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By PAUL LINDAU

Author of "LACE"



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BY  
✓  
PAUL LINDAU  
AUTHOR OF LACE

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN  
BY WINCHESTER AYER AND HELEN FOLGER



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# HANGING MOSS.

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## CHAPTER I.

FELIX WELSHEIM was the architect of his own fortunes. Of this fact he was very proud, and to all who wished to hear his story, and to many who did not, he was fond of relating how in the mad year of 1848, when only a lad of fifteen years, he had come to the great city of Berlin, his shoes ragged and torn, and his only capital six good groschen; how he began his business career as errand-boy in the house of E. Tillmann & Sons, an old-established firm held in high respect in the business world. At that time the head of the house was Ewald Tillmann, the grandson of the founder of the firm, which had sustained its honourable reputation since the end of the previous century.

The worthy Tillmann took a fancy to Felix, and recognised in him an active and wide-awake boy. As an experiment he gave him a commis-



sion far exceeding the demands usually made upon an errand-boy, and, when this was fulfilled to his entire satisfaction, he called Felix into his office one morning and informed him that he would take him into the business as an apprentice, continuing his salary as a special favour—under the condition that no one in the office should hear of it. Ten years later Mr. Tillmann was able to send his *protégé* to the Exchange to transact business for the house, and Felix Welsheim showed such a decided business talent, operated with such prudence and success, not only for his employer but also for himself, that four years later, when Tillmann angrily reproached him one day with speculating on his own responsibility, and of having culpably used to his own advantage a business secret divulged to him in strictest confidence, Felix assumed an air of most righteous indignation, and broke off all connection with his benefactor on the spot.

He had long waited for this day. In the early part of the year 1858 his name appeared in the Commercial Register as the head of a banking and commission business. Fortune favoured all his important undertakings.

In midsummer of 1866, at the breaking out of the Austro-Prussian War, when a temporary de-



pression occurred in all securities, he stretched his credit to the utmost, so as to speculate largely in real estate—with brilliant success. Felix Welsheim was now looked upon as a man of means, but in reality he was much richer than people supposed. He gave up his cosy, modest dwelling in the Krausen Strasse and hired an apartment on the first floor of a fine new building in the Victoria Strasse. None of his friends and acquaintances supposed for a moment that he would lead his solitary bachelor life for any length of time in his new quarters, and the supposition that he was on the lookout for a wife was confirmed when he began gradually to withdraw from all convivialities at the Linden Restaurant, and to break off his connection with a third-rate actress from a fourth-rate theatre, with whom he had often been seen, and when in the following winter he made his appearance at all the fashionable affairs.

“Welsheim is coming,” the hostess would whisper meaningly to the mothers of marriageable daughters, certain of producing a pleasant impression by this announcement.

But the winter went by, and spring and summer, and Welsheim had not yet found among the daughters of the land the fair one he sought. At last, in the autumn, he met a young girl at Scar-



borough who pleased him exceedingly, and to whom he paid most assiduous court.

She was Miss Leonie Delponte, of Holland birth but Portuguese descent, and the daughter of a well-to-do merchant of Amsterdam. She was now twenty years old, and her mother had carefully instilled into her mind the necessity of making a brilliant marriage. For the last three years she had been taken to the fashionable baths, to the Riviera, and to Paris; and nothing in the way of display had been omitted in order to capture the expectant millionaire or nobleman of ancient family—but till now without avail. For some time a distinct feeling of uneasiness had seized both mother and daughter, and accordingly, when Felix Welsheim approached the Delponte family he received an exceptionally gracious reception. As Mrs. Delponte perceived that the young German banker would undoubtedly propose to her Leonie within the next few days, she wired at once to her husband in Amsterdam to make thorough inquiries in Berlin. The result was gratifying, and Leonie received permission to accept Mr. Welsheim's wooing with correctly lowered lids, and blushing to refer him to mamma at the proper time. The affair took its regular course. At the beginning of October, 1868, the engage-



ment of Miss Leonie Delponte to Mr. Felix Welsheim was announced.

In the middle of December the wedding took place, and at the end of January, 1869, the young couple, having spent their honeymoon in Cannes and Nice, came to Berlin.

Leonie made no little stir in Berlin society. She was undoubtedly, if not the loveliest, certainly one of the most elegant and piquant, of all the young women of the capital. Her small head, with its heavy dark hair, was finely set; her shoulders, her neck, her arms, roused the admiration of the men, and consequently the envy of the women. She dressed with a certain originality, yet simply and in perfect good taste. But her greatest charm lay in her remarkable eyes. They were neither excessively large nor even beautiful, but there was a singular questioning look in their depths; their fleeting, far-away glance lighted for an instant on persons and things, then passed quickly on and seemed to lose itself in empty air.

Leonie was something of a coquette. She was a brilliant conversationalist, and, as she upheld the most daring opinions with astonishing boldness, she soon earned the reputation of a clever woman. She talked with the assurance of a queen on all



subjects, possible and impossible, and invariably said the opposite of what others said.

Unsuccessful plays she found charming, works of art which made a sensation she declared to be bungling atrocities, and in the perpetrator of some most brutal deed who met his just deserts she pitied the martyr to social prejudice.

Leonie unquestionably possessed one great advantage over the women who were her social equals. She was more broad-minded. She had seen and heard more and knew better how to adopt that charming unaffectedness in social intercourse than did most of her kind. At the time when Berlin was still in swaddling clothes, Leonie was one of the few, perhaps the only one, who had known how to draw a circle about her which bore some resemblance to the cosmopolitan *salon*. With an inborn tact, fostered by good training, she knew how to establish a delightful unanimity between the widely varied elements accustomed to meet at her house informally on Tuesday evenings.

Each young man, whether he belonged to the diplomatic corps or the army, or was wedded to literature or art, or played a part in commerce or on the Exchange, imagined himself to be specially favoured by his charming hostess, and believed with some reason that he dared read, in a quickly



intercepted glance of those dreamy eyes, something like an assent to an unspoken question.

During the Franco-Prussian War Welsheim had trebled his fortune. He was now one of the notable figures on the Berlin Exchange. His intimacy with people who were in the position to be well informed on the political situation was well known, and when he held forth on the great topics of the day he was always surrounded by a crowd of eager listeners. On these occasions he assumed an air of great importance, wrinkled his forehead into deep lines, thrust his hands in his pockets, and slowly tilted backwards and forwards on his heels and toes. It was not necessary for his jokes to be good, for them to go the rounds during business hours and to take their way later up the Burgstrasse, to the Thiergarten. In a word, Welsheim had become an important man in the financial world. Beginners felt flattered when he spoke to them, and he himself looked down with smiling superiority upon old Tillmann, whom he had long ago outstripped.

This important and dictatorial man in his business circle shrank to a mere nonentity in his own household. Leonie had never looked up to him, and it seemed perfectly natural to her that she should rule him. She alone settled all important



and unimportant questions, without brooking any attempt at interference, and much less any opposition. She decided the sending out of invitations and the acceptance or refusal of those received, the theatre night, the summer resort, the household arrangements. Felix had no voice in the matter. At times, when he was puzzled, and meekly asked an explanation with a certain helplessness which was in ludicrous contrast to the self-assured manner of the business man, she laughingly cut short any further discussion with the words, "*Mon ami, cela ne te regarde pas*"—for in such cases Leonie was always in the habit of using French.

Among the young men who never failed to appear regularly every Tuesday at Mrs. Welsheim's receptions, the young author, Dr. Hugo Hall, seemed most to please the taste of his hostess. Dr. Hall was first introduced to Welsheim in 1872. At that time the young author was twenty-nine years old. He had originally gone deeply into the natural sciences, botany in particular. The success of a little volume of poems had induced him to put aside his studies and to devote himself entirely to literature. He enjoyed the reputation of possessing unusual talent—genius, in fact—although he had as yet done nothing to deserve this



reputation. The sketches which he had published made some sensation on account of their *bizarre*, paradoxical form, but they affected one like the tortured utterances of a morbid mind. But those who believed in Hall's greatness attached little importance to these trifles. They declared that Hall had other arrows in his quiver, and the world would be amazed when he launched them. Dr. Hall's prospective work, about which none could tell whether it was to be written in prose or poetry, was to be a novel or a drama, was already famous before a line was written.

Mrs. Welsheim had done more than any one else to produce this impression. The author's prospective fame was not a little advanced by his personality. Hall was indeed a striking-looking man—tall, broad-shouldered, easy and graceful in his bearing. He had more the appearance of a southerner. He wore his hair and soft brown beard closely clipped. The smooth, high arched forehead inclosed no ordinary intellect. The finely shaped mouth, with the full lips, betrayed a sensuous nature. The big brown eyes changed expression constantly as he talked, and made an eloquent commentary on his words. Hall pleased all women, and unless all signs were at fault, Leonie in particular. He was quite aware of the



pleasing impression he produced on the weaker sex, and was openly anxious to retain this power. Although things went none too well with him, and he was tormented with constant money troubles, he spent as much on his clothes as the best-known men of the world. As soon as he found himself in the society of women he took up any *rôle* occasion required, and his mobile face assumed to order the expression of the deep thinker, the pessimist, the desperate flirt, or the utter fool.

At their first meeting, Leonie had made an unusual impression upon him, and she herself—who was accustomed to strengthen each young man in the delusion that she favoured him above all others, and was more attracted to him than she ought to be—had taken a more lively interest in Hugo Hall's melancholy and yet passionate eyes than she was willing to admit even to herself.

After the first unavoidable trivialities of a new acquaintance they had scarcely spoken together five minutes when they discovered simultaneously that they were equally skilled opponents in the subtle art of drawing-room skirmishing. Both had the instinctive feeling that their acquaintance would not be limited to a mere superficial bandying of words; that an unseen power was forcing



them fatally towards each other, and both recoiled before it. Both were exasperated at each other without any apparent cause.

Leonie, who only made malicious remarks about people when they were absent, was especially charming towards all her guests. But it seemed an impossibility for her to say a single friendly word to Hugo. She was cutting, sarcastic, almost rude. Hugo, though spoiled by kindness, was not in the least discomposed by such treatment. He acted as though he had expected it, and seemed to find it quite in the order of things. He only attracted the young woman all the more by his coolness and feigned indifference. She was seriously provoked, and left him with intentional rudeness. "You are really too young and not yet famous enough to smile in such a superior way," she said, as her blue eyes scanned his. Then she turned her back upon him, and, slowly fanning herself, went towards a group of chattering guests. In their midst she soon recovered her tone of charming affability. Although she apparently took no further notice of the author whom she had snubbed so ungraciously, she thought of no one but him, and he alone in the crowded rooms seemed a living being to her; all others were but as shadows and phantoms. And when for a time



she lost sight of him, and reflected that he had taken his departure without bidding her good night, a strange uneasiness came over her. She abruptly broke off the conversation in which she was taking part, pleading the duties of a hostess, and went in search of him.

Hugo had intended slipping quietly out of the house whose mistress had been so provokingly uncivil to him, but he had stayed, for stay he must. He had persuaded himself that he could not afford Mrs. Welsheim the triumph of having driven him from the field at the first encounter. But, in truth, triumph or defeat had nothing to do with it. He felt himself held in Leonie's presence; whether she treated him well or ill it mattered not, the principal thing was that he was near her, could see her and hear her. He saw how all faces brightened, as if by the reflection of her peculiar charm, when she approached the various groups with her bewitching smile. He admired the beautiful, slender figure, the loveliness of the rounded throat and the dazzling neck, and the wonderful mass of soft dark hair with its little coquettish curls, and he quite forgot that he bore any grudge against Leonie herself. He was filled with a longing to be more to her than other men; he had also a certain proud premonition of success.



Just then he noticed that Leonie was advancing through the rooms with that peculiar smile and address which conveys an unspoken desire not to be detained in conversation, and was letting her gaze wander slowly and systematically through the rooms. She had not yet seen him in the shadow of a recess behind a tall mass of flowers, and he still had time to assume the position and to take on the expression which seemed the most effective and fitting. He decided on a careless, languid air of superiority and an expression of unruffled calm. Suddenly she caught sight of him. Their eyes met only for the immeasurable space of a second, but both stood transfixed, with throbbing hearts. Then she passed on, serene and smiling as before, and said to a young lady who stood near her: "Where did you get those lovely gardenias? I shall certainly change my florist. For six months he has sent me nothing but miserable things on wires!" The lady gave her her florist's address, recommending him highly. Leonie thanked her with effusion. She had not heard a word. As if she could think of gardenias and flowers on wires, or any other way, at this moment! She did not speak one word to Hugo Hall.

Only, as he came to take leave of her, one of the last guests, towards two in the morn-



ing, she said, and this time with unfeigned friendliness :

“We shall see you soon again?”

“As soon as you will permit me—next Tuesday, if it will not be too presumptuous.”

“Oh, that is much too long a time to wait! By that time the opinion that you must have of me will be too firmly rooted, and I am anxious that you should learn to know me better.”

“I already think the very best of you, but of course it would be the greatest honour and pleasure to me—”

“Are you engaged for to-morrow evening?”

“If I may see *you* to-morrow, no.”

“Then come to the theatre with us. There has been so much said in favour of the new play. Liedke, Ehrhartt, and old Doering must be very fine. Have you seen the *première*?”

“No, not yet.”

“Then I may count on you? I will send you the ticket to-morrow noon. We shall be alone—with my husband—”

“You are too kind. Until to-morrow, then—”

“Until to-morrow—”

She held out her hand from which she had been drawing her glove as they talked. He raised the



slender fingers to his lips, and respectfully took his leave.

When, soon after, the last guest had left, and Welsheim wished his wife good night, kissing her on the forehead, Leonie said:

“I want a box for the theatre to-morrow night.”

Welsheim looked up in astonishment.

“Why, this morning when I asked you, you said—”

“This morning I had no desire for one, but now I wish it, dear Felix.”

“But, my dear child, it will be very difficult. Since last night’s success, every seat in the house has been taken—”

“You will find ways and means,” smiled Leonie. “I have the utmost confidence in you.”

“I will do all I can, but I cannot promise.”

“I have no fear. I have heard so much about the play to-day—”

“Yes, yes; I will do all I can.”

“By the way,” said Leonie carelessly, already turned towards the door, “the young doctor whom Ringstetter brought here, the author—what is his name?”

“Dr. Hall.”

“Yes. I have asked Dr. Hall to go with us. You know his address, and you will have the kind-



ness to send him the ticket in the course of the afternoon. Good night again."

The following day, at the Exchange, Welsheim secured a box at three times its value, and sent the ticket to Dr. Hugo Hall, at Mrs. Councillor Breuer's, Brüder Strasse.



## CHAPTER II.

Six months had passed since that evening which Leonie Welsheim and Hugo Hall—with the obliging co-operation of Mr. Felix Welsheim—had spent together at the theatre. It was in April of 1873 that Dr. Ringstetter, the equally malicious and clever retailer of all unpleasant stories, told Mrs. Welsheim that her young *protégé* was only awaiting the success of his play on which he had been working assiduously since his acquaintance with Leonie, to marry his landlady's daughter, a Miss Martha Breuer, to whom he had been engaged for over a year.

Louis had at first taken the intelligence as a somewhat tasteless joke. But Ringstetter gave such a mass of details, which seemed so thoroughly credible, that she could no longer doubt the truth of the startling news. She affected an extravagant gaiety, found the story too amusing, too ridiculous, and laughed so violently that Ringstetter's suspicions regarding the intimacy which



had arisen between the two were considerably strengthened.

She asked indifferently about the young girl—but not indifferently enough to deceive the sharp-sighted Ringstetter—and learned that her name was Martha Breuer; that she was the daughter of a Mrs. Councillor Breuer, *née* Tillmann, a poor widow who eked out her scanty pension by taking lodgers, and even then had scarcely enough to provide herself and her sickly child with the bare necessities of life. Hugo Hall had already lived more than five years at Mrs. Breuer's. The pale Martha, with her great blue eyes of unnatural brilliancy, and her transparent skin through which the veins in the temples could be plainly seen, had touched and charmed him. He had passed many hours in the widow's small sitting-room, had read his poems to Martha, who had listened to his words with glowing eyes, and, without his being able to say exactly how he had come to do it, he had asked for Martha's hand, and had afterwards persuaded himself that he was in love with her.

Martha had been no less surprised at the offer than he was at making it. Brought up from childhood in suffering and poverty, she had lived quietly and hopelessly within herself; it had never occurred to her that she was a woman who might



be loved. She had almost no associates, she had never been wooed, and when she incidentally heard a remark concerning this or that young man, she only smiled, for she had nothing to say. She seldom left her mother, who continually bemoaned a needy widow's sad lot and the injustice of fortune, and she secretly worked, as far as her strength permitted, for a large embroidery firm, to add a few groschen to her mother's slender income. She considered herself utterly unattractive—without reason; for she was a simple, modest, lovable child, even a very pretty girl when one looked at her more closely. But one had to look at her *very* closely—even her beauty was modest and retiring. The wealth of beautiful blonde hair, which seemed to suck up the greater part of the delicate girl's strength, was scarcely to be seen to advantage in its simple arrangement. Only when she laughed—and her laugh came seldom—did one see the brilliant white teeth. She was of middle height, thin, and at eighteen was still undeveloped as a child. It was some time before it became clear to her what Dr. Hall—who until then had been to her only the tenant of the large room—meant by his proposal. When the first long kiss which Hugo pressed on her small mouth brought enlightenment—the first kiss, which she returned with closed



eyes, and which burned on her delicate lips, and then left them cold as ice—a feeling of unspeakable content came over her. It was as though spring had burst forth in her heart, as if, of a sudden, her pure womanhood were freed from its prison. She felt herself a woman, and clung in passionate tenderness and grateful love to the man who had revealed to her the most marvellous secret of life. The sweet purity, the complete surrender of the girl had touched Hugo deeply. He imagined that by a kindly dispensation of Fate he had unwittingly found the woman destined for him—whom he loved, or would learn to love. And so the first part of the betrothal was bright and sunny. Martha was transformed. Her languid, tired manner had gained in life and precision, her pale cheeks were slightly flushed. She had become brighter and stronger. Hugo worked with more eagerness than formerly. He now had a goal before his eyes. He felt that he had undertaken serious duties, and it was his faithful endeavour to fulfil these duties.

Winter came. It was easy for Hugo to explain to his affianced wife, who believed him blindly, that as a writer who had chosen the modern life of a great city as his particular study, he must go into society, no matter, as he asserted, how much it bored him.



It was equally a matter of course that Martha, whose very sober, modest attire taxed her mother's inventive genius to the utmost, did not accompany him.

She stayed at home without a murmur, and smiled after him when he took leave of her in his dress suit and white tie which became him so well. Sometimes, indeed, a secret longing arose in her to share in some of the brilliant entertainments which, it seemed to her, Hugo spoke of altogether too contemptuously. But she was sensible enough to see that she longed for an impossibility. She comforted herself with the reflection that, when Hugo earned the well-deserved reward of his talents, everything would be different. She would wait patiently—yes, patiently. It must indeed be difficult to learn the life and ways of the favoured world in which her lover moved.

Hugo's social duties constantly increased. He went out every evening, and did not return until late. She always heard him come in, heard the street door open and shut, and the turning of the key in the hall door.

Not until then did she sleep—often with a heavy heart. But when he came in so late, why did Hugo invariably give, unasked, an earlier hour than the true one? Out of regard for her, of



course. He was so kind! And she needed some consideration now. For the fleeting roses which the spring-time of love had driven to her cheeks, the weary, sleepless nights had long since withered. Martha looked ghastly pale now, and the dark circles under her strangely brilliant eyes made them unnaturally large.

By mutual consent there was little said about the engagement. As circumstances did not as yet admit of their appearing together in public, the announcement would only lead to annoyance and troublesome questions. Hugo was plainly right: what did the indifferent world need to know of their happiness?

But as a secret is difficult to keep, one and another had discovered that Hugo had already disposed of his hand and heart. He never mentioned it, however, and no one was sufficiently intimate with him to warrant speaking of it without invitation. His conduct in society would not have caused the keenest to suspect any engagement. He acted in the freest, most unhampered manner possible towards the pretty girls, and especially towards the prettiest young married women. Since he had been drawn into Mrs. Welsheim's most intimate circle, such a suspicion seemed improbable in the extreme.



Till now, Leonie, indeed, had suspected nothing. When Ringstetter told her the startling news, an entirely new sensation came over her, and she felt as though she had been plunged into a bath of icy water. A painful embarrassment forced her to lower her lids, in spite of her clear, high laughter. And when Ringstetter had taken his leave and she was alone, her face grew distorted and she suddenly looked ten years older. She took a few hasty steps and touched the bell. Her first impulse was to put on her hat, order the carriage, and seek the girl. That the story was true she had no doubt. It explained all that had been inexplicable before: Hugo's sudden depression in the midst of the wildest spirits, his aversion to showing himself with her in public, his ambiguous words—in fact, all. She must see the girl, she must tell her—what must she, yes, what could she tell her? How could she explain the extraordinary and compromising visit to her and to him?

“It is nothing,” she said to the servant, who had appeared in the doorway.

John bowed and disappeared. Leonie seated herself on the low divan in the bow window and gazed through the delicate curtains at the grey branches, just beginning to take on a tinge of green. The blithe afternoon sunshine accorded



ill with her gloomy mood. She breathed so fast and sighed so heavily that she was frightened at herself.

Everything that had passed between them now came up before her — since their first meeting and since the fateful night at the theatre, when she had felt his arm, which rested on the back of her chair, warm against her shoulder, and yet had made no effort to change her position. She regretted that on that same evening she had answered his long, meaning pressure of the hand at parting, with one equally fervent and full of promise, and had trembled visibly, although she had managed to remain calm without any very great effort. She had not only suffered Hugo to remain in her presence, but had drawn him to her. She had not trifled with him in any merely superficial way as she did with others, but had plainly shown him that her feelings towards him were something far deeper. She had given him the right to reproach her for her coquetry, she had allowed him with evident pleasure to dictate to her, and had followed his wishes in treating this one or that of her friends with marked coldness, and avoiding their houses. She had taken advantage of his jealousy with a strange gladness, and allowed him to torment himself without cause.



To be sure, she was at fault, but he was the more guilty. If he really loved her, her alone, he would have given up everything for her. But how could she now believe him any longer—he, who for half a year had approached her with a lie, or rather, a concealed truth; who had said to another, and must still be saying, what he unceasingly said to her by the longing glance of his dark eyes, by the pressure of his hand, by his low sighs, with his entire being? There was a woman whom he might take in his arms and kiss before God and the whole world.

She felt a flame of colour dyeing her cheeks. She was beside herself—not from anger alone. She had a feeling of the deepest shame and humiliation that his heart should be disputed with her by such a person. It was plainly some accomplished coquette who had drawn him into her net. What sort of a woman would *she* be, to quietly submit to this degrading situation?

Leonie threw open the window and let the pure fresh breeze rush into the room where the fire was still burning.

Her brain was confused and agitated, and the cool air did her good. In vain she had tried to come to some decision as to what attitude she should take towards Hugo. The wisest course



would be simply to ignore the matter. But she told herself that it would be beyond her to carry out such a farce. Should she make a scene and break off with him on the spot? Should she slight him and gradually alienate him? Should she go to extremes and give him the alternative of choosing between that other woman and her; and, as the price of the sacrifice which her jealousy demanded, grant him what he required unceasingly, and what, up till now, she had refused him?

All seemed equally impossible to her, but most impossible of all that things should remain on their old footing between her and Hugo. They must now be forcibly driven apart, or irrevocably brought together.

Leonie shivered with cold and closed the window. She was startled when she looked at the clock and found that an hour had passed since Ringstetter's departure. In any case it was now too late to go out. Welsheim had probably already come home, and dinner would be announced in half an hour.

She did not know what to do with herself. She went mechanically to her dressing-room and looked over her spring wardrobe which had just come from Paris. The most striking toilet suited



her taste at that moment. She summoned her maid Germaine, whom she had brought with her from Holland, and told her she wished to be dressed for dinner.

"Is there company, then?" asked Germaine, whom Leonie not only allowed to speak without being spoken to, but also ask questions on her own account.

"No!" answered Leonie with a sharpness that astonished the girl.

"But it is a shame to put that on for the master alone," objected Germaine.

"I wish to wear it! Do as I say," answered Leonie, even more brusquely than before.

"As madame wishes," replied Germaine submissively.

After a time, while her skilled hands were adjusting the wonderful Worth creation to the slender figure, she added dejectedly:

"Madame is angry at something. Is madame displeased? Madame looks quite worn out."

Welsheim had had a particularly good day on 'change, and was in high spirits.

"Ah!" he exclaimed in admiration as Leonie rustled into the room in her light dress, "that suits me. Really charming! Ah, those Frenchmen—if we were only as far advanced! Let me



take a good look at you; the soup won't get cold so quickly—"

"Come, please," said Leonie, who had already approached the dining-room door.

"In honour of the new gown," began Welsheim, as he resumed the conversation at the dinner-table, "we ought to go out somewhere. It is really too good for me alone."

Leonie had to smile involuntarily at the recollection that Germaine had used precisely the same words half an hour before.

"As you please," she answered with feigned indifference. She had firmly resolved to allow herself to be persuaded by her husband to spend the evening in Hall's society. She thought it best for a thousand reasons that her first meeting with Hugo should take place under the restraint which her husband's presence imposed. At the same time she was consumed with the desire to see the girl that very day. She felt that only her husband could help her to gain her end in a natural manner. She did not know at the moment exactly how it should be brought about, but she had great faith in her well-exercised faculty of imputing to Welsheim the wishes that were really her own. Her gaze wandered restlessly from one object to another.



"Shall we go to some theatre? No? Very well. The circus? Also no? Ah, I have it! Now I think of it, there is a good programme at the Reichshalle—wonderful American gymnasts, a singer from Vienna, as pretty as a picture, a jolly pantomime. What do you think? I will send and get a box—we will take a couple of friends—"

"Two?"

"Well, or only one—just as you please—Dr. Hall, for instance—"

Leonie raised her eyebrows.

"Why not?" continued Felix, and he added in a different tone: "I don't understand you, my dear Leonie. For some time you have been pointedly cold towards our poor doctor. No, no, don't deny it! I have good eyes and nothing escapes me. You hurt the poor man. He admires you greatly. You may believe me. Be a little more friendly towards him. It is easy for you to do so, and you will be gratifying a fine fellow."

"You are mistaken. I have nothing at all against the doctor."

"Then you are more ungracious than you intend to be."

"That may be."



"But, to speak plainly, it is very disagreeable to me. I like Hall, and I should be very sorry if you should drive him away by your rudeness, which in all probability is quite unintentional. You see, others who were so much at home with us formerly have not been pleased at your treatment, and have finally kept away—nice men too, whom you used to like well enough. You are really too hard on them—"

Leonie shrugged her shoulders.

"I will prove to you the opposite," she said languidly. "As far as I am concerned, let us go to the Reichshalle, and let us call for the doctor if you are so bent upon it. We can wait outside for him, in the carriage." Without giving her husband time to remark that it had never occurred to him to call for the doctor, she continued:

"To be sure, it is somewhat extraordinary for us to call for a young bachelor at his lodgings. But I am not prejudiced; and as you wish it—I cannot show the doctor more plainly that I have nothing against him; I hope you will be satisfied now—"

"To be sure, to be sure!" answered Felix, somewhat uncertainly, while he replaced on the table the glass from which he had been drinking, and raised his napkin to his lips. Had he then



really made the suggestion to Leonie that they should pick up Dr. Hall? He could not remember at all, but it suited him, and, as Leonie was willing, he turned to the servant:

“The landau at half-past seven.”

When Leonie appeared in the drawing-room at the appointed hour, thoughtfully buttoning her gloves, she said to Welsheim, who already awaited her, opera glasses in hand:

“We had better drive directly to the Reichshalle. John can give the invitation to the doctor in our name.”

“But no!” answered Welsheim somewhat impatiently, “it is too late for that. Good God! don’t be so prudish. The thing is perfectly proper—in my company.”

“As you please. Does Dr. Hall live well?”

“I have never been to his lodgings.”

“Look about you a little while you are there. It would interest me to catch a glimpse of an author’s workshop. One can never judge a man fairly until one has seen how he lives.”

“He probably lives as most young men live—”

“That is a point upon which I certainly cannot contradict you—that the artist’s studio and the writer’s study are something different from a



dandy's apartments. It is, as you very truly said, a sort of museum, a neutral ground—"

"To be sure," assented Welsheim, somewhat surprised—he had no recollection of ever having made such a remark—"to be sure, like a museum—"

"But allow me, Felix," gaily interrupted Leonie, who had mastered the last button, while she took Welsheim's arm and urged him to greater haste. "The accusation of prudery which you just made against me can hardly fit if I should dare to enter the lion's den. He will certainly not tear me to pieces. I have a strong support in you, my natural protector—"

"What do you mean?" They had reached the house door.

"Brüder Strasse, to Dr. Hall's," Felix gave orders to the waiting footman, who, after touching his hat and carefully closing the carriage door, mounted to his seat and took his place beside the pompous coachman.

"Of course, it would amuse me," Leonie went on, as the carriage rolled swiftly and noiselessly on its rubber tires through the streets of the city, "to rout up the good doctor in his den. Personally I have as little feeling about it as you have. But I don't know what people—"



"You are thinking of going in with me?" asked Welsheim in new astonishment.

"If it would amuse you I would willingly risk it," answered Leonie with her bewitching smile, while she laid her small hand on his, fingering it caressingly. "You shall not reproach me a second time with being too prudish—in your company—"

"It seems to me perfectly natural that you should come with me to get an intimate friend. I was only afraid that we might embarrass the doctor if we should come upon him unexpectedly."

"It would be a fine joke!" laughed Leonie gaily. "You occasionally have brilliant inspirations! Wouldn't the doctor be surprised if he saw us before him all at once? What could have brought such a radiant vision to his hut!—for you cannot have failed to observe that I have made myself especially beautiful to-night."

"To be sure," answered Felix, with a smile of self-satisfaction, as his eyes wandered lovingly over the toilet which had already delighted him, "you have really surpassed yourself this evening."

"But with no regard for the doctor," she smiled, "that I swear to you. Now you must not declare, after all, that I have put on my most interesting



gown and most coquettish hat for Hall's sake—you ingrate!”

“You really look wonderfully well!” exclaimed Felix tenderly, and raised the small hand which still rested on his to his lips.

“I promise myself a wonderful sensation,” continued Leonie in the same sprightly way, “when we enter the doctor's room, hand in hand—”

“So you are really in earnest?—you wish to go with me to—”

“*I wish?*” broke in Leonie, “*I wish?*” she repeated; “but you are confusing our *rôles*, my dear. If you have the least scruple—I can remain quietly outside in the carriage—”

“You misunderstand me. I have no scruples.”

“I should prefer to remain below. I simply did not wish to spoil your joke. But if you think that people—”

“Pshaw! People! What nonsense! A woman—”

“Very well.” She pressed his hand and they looked at each other, smiling. Leonie was rejoicing that she had accomplished her desire to visit Hugo's house that very day, and Welsheim rejoiced over his charming, sprightly wife, and was convinced that he had persuaded her to take the doctor by surprise.



The carriage stopped before a cheerless house in the old street. Leonie and Felix entered. The stairs were imperfectly lighted by a flickering gas jet, which flared up in a three-pronged flame. The steps were worn. The landings of each separate floor formed a narrow, almost rectangular triangle. On each side of the triangle was a glass door painted white, whose panes were hung with cheap curtains. The house was neat and clean, but poor in the extreme. On the second floor on the right, under the porcelain bell-handle, was a porcelain plate, bearing in large black letters, "E. Breuer"; below was tacked a small visiting-card on which could be read, "Dr. Hugo Hall."

Welsheim rang the bell. In a moment a door inside the house was opened and the curtain drawn back a little. There was a short, embarrassed pause. Leonie's heart beat violently; she needed all her strength of will to preserve her composure. The outside door was slowly opened, and on the threshold appeared a young girl, ghastly pale in the disadvantageous light, with smooth blonde hair of extraordinary thickness, whose weight seemed to drag back the small head. Her eyes were large and bright. She wore a plain dark woollen dress, and a neat little apron trimmed with crocheted lace. Leonie let her glance flash



over the feeble girl in feverish haste, and she bit her lips to prevent a smile. Martha experienced a very uncomfortable feeling at the sight of this beautiful, well-dressed woman, who involuntarily had assumed a haughty manner. Leonie, who had drawn a very different picture of Hugo's *fiancée*, now found the pitiful, insignificant girl simply laughable.

"Is Dr. Hall at home?" asked Welsheim, at the same time giving Martha his card.

"I think so. Will you kindly walk in?"

"I will wait here," Leonie said to her husband. "You can see whether the doctor will receive me."

"If you will be content with our little sitting-room, madame—it is really too uncomfortable here."

"You are very kind, my dear young lady," Leonie answered, bowing slightly.

She followed the young girl into the back room and sat down on the chair Martha offered her. Welsheim remained standing in the half-lighted, narrow, winding corridor. Martha rejoined him immediately, knocked on the door of the front room, and entered in response to the "Come in" from within. Directly afterwards Hugo appeared, and cried out in a resonant voice that sounded almost too loud: "Is it possible! This



is a surprise ! Pray, come in. What has brought me this unlooked-for pleasure ? ”

The door was closed again. Only the murmur of voices could be heard, but no words were distinguishable.

Leonie took a hasty survey of the meagre room. There was not much to see. Well-preserved pieces of furniture, which had not been handsome even in their younger days ; a sofa and two arm-chairs upholstered in green reps and protected by crocheted tidies ; on the table, the bright-coloured cover of which lay neatly folded upon the closed piano, was spread a table-cloth with places set for two ; in the centre, by the kerosene lamp, a small platter of cold meat, a butter-dish, a bread-basket, and a bottle of Tivoli beer ; on the wall an engraving of the “Madonna della Sedia” ; beneath, the pictures of the Emperor, the Crown Prince, Bismarck, and Moltke ; above the piano a lithograph of Beethoven ; hanging book-shelves, with a dozen or two books in cloth bindings, over a small, decrepit desk ; near the window, a flower-stand with an India-rubber plant, cheap flowers from the market, and a globe of gold-fish ; near by, a sewing-table, against which leaned an embroidery frame. Leonie was not disturbed in her hasty survey of these humble details, for the widow was



busy in the kitchen, heating the water for the tea. Leonie's lips parted in a curious smile, a mixture of pity and contempt.

"And this is living!" she said, with a slow nod, and, raising her eyebrows, she asked the portentous question, "to what purpose?"

Just then Martha entered the room. The same feeling of embarrassment seized her again when she came into Leonie's presence, and inhaled the sensuous, overpowering perfume of the gardenias which she wore at her breast. Without looking up, she knew that Leonie was regarding her with, one might almost say, uncivil scrutiny. At first it was painful, then it became almost sinister, and with a certain superstitious dread she raised her lashes and turned the quiet, steady gaze of her great, shining eyes upon the stranger. She was well-nigh terrified as she met Leonie's sharp, penetrating look. In those small, restless eyes, with their dilating pupils, lay something distinctly hostile. An inexplicable foreboding, which had almost the significance of a warning, told Martha that this beautiful woman would bring her unhappiness and work her lasting harm. She shrank back involuntarily and busied herself unnecessarily with the table-cover which lay upon the piano, thus enabling her to turn her back to Leonie.



Neither spoke a word, and both breathed audibly, their lips tightly compressed.

Happily, this painful interview only lasted a few moments, but they seemed to Martha quite long enough. Hugo hastily opened the door and entered, exclaiming in a loud tone, as though to cover his embarrassment:

"This is really very kind of you, my dear madame. Your husband has just told me— If you do not fear a bachelor's modest and somewhat disorderly apartments— May I beg—?"

He offered Leonie his arm.

"But you must not look about you," he added, as he left the room with Leonie and without a glance at Martha, and closed the door behind him.

Martha went to the door and looked after them as at some strange sight. She remained standing there, and there she still stood when her mother came out of the kitchen with the teapot.

"Hugo has visitors—a gentleman and lady."

"A lady?" Mrs. Breuer asked in astonishment; "who is it?"

"I do not know her. I did not read the name on the card which the gentleman, who seems to be her husband, gave me. I think it is Mrs. Welsheim."



"Is that the rich banker of whom Hugo has spoken so often?"

"Yes."

"How did you come to think of him?"

"I don't know. I just imagined it."

"I wasn't even aware that Mr. Welsheim was married."

"But Hugo once spoke of a Mrs. Welsheim, and he was very much embarrassed at it. He has never spoken of her since. I think it is Mrs. Welsheim."

"Well, we shall find out later. Now sit down. The tea has steeped long enough."

"I am quite sure it is Mrs. Welsheim," Martha repeated, as she took her place opposite her mother. She had become very pale, but two red spots burned on either hollow cheek. She scarcely touched the food before her.

As Leonie entered the spacious study, she was seized with a spirit of mischief. She exulted in having gained her end. She was secretly amused at being treated by Hugo with conventional politeness before Martha, and she considered it a good joke that he did not venture to give his *fiancée* even a look in her presence. Exultation over this easy victory drowned all other feeling for the moment. She banished all thought of care, and she



was in an almost cheerful frame of mind as she walked through Hugo's room with critical glances.

"So this is the way a writer and scholar lives," she said, with a smile.

It was a room with double windows, directly in front of one of which stood a broad study-table. A tall bookcase of polished wood occupied the whole of the opposite wall; the rest of the furniture was plain but not poor. The door of the little sleeping-room adjoining was closed. The bookcase was filled for the most part with pamphlets arranged in systematic order upon the four upper shelves. On the two lower shelves were disposed the belongings that recalled Hugo's earlier scientific pursuits: here stood a microscope, there lay botanical magazines and collections of dried plants. At each corner there had been some attempt at decoration: at the right, a bunch of beautiful pampas grass, whose creamy-coloured plumes with glints of gold had become ashy grey from dust and cigar-smoke; at the left, a strange plant growth hung down to the floor from a height almost that of a man—a strange, crinkled, tangled moss, softly waving, and of a dull-green tint, producing a melancholy and yet graceful effect, like a widow's veil.

"What is that?" Leonie asked, cautiously



touching the meshes here and there with her small gloved fingers.

“The uninitiated call it ‘hanging moss.’ The botanical name is *Tillandsia usneoides*.”

“It is very pretty. Where does it grow?”

“In the southern part of the United States and in Mexico. It is very beautiful from an artistic standpoint, but a fatal adornment to the trees, especially to the oaks and cedars, for it invariably destroys the trees to which it attaches itself.”

“Then it is a parasite?”

“Not exactly that. But you may safely call it so. In order to correctly describe the nature of the *Tillandsia* to you, I should have to deliver a lecture that would hardly interest you—”

“On the contrary, it would interest me very much.”

“Well, I will make it as short as possible. We botanists give ~~the~~ name of parasite, in its true meaning, to those plants which sink their own roots into the fibre of the foster-plant and get their nourishment from the other’s life. The *Tillandsia* does not do this. It grows only upon the surface, without penetrating into the fibre. The *Tillandsia*, the rank, luxuriant moss, which you see there, deprives the tree of light and air,



or the carbon which nourishes it, thus stifling and starving it."

"How strange! And does the tree die?"

"Yes, the tree dies, but the *Tillandsia* has a tenacious life and continues to grow luxuriantly upon the dead trunk. Each little portion of the moss that is torn away by the wind is borne to another tree and remains fixed there, again spreads until it has covered everything with its meshes, and deprives that tree, too, of light and air. But the trees from which this beautiful veil of moss floats have a really wonderful appearance, magnificent in their gradual death. The *Tillandsia* itself, which destroys them, provides them with their shroud."

"It is strange what uniformity there is in Nature."

"It would be stranger if it were otherwise. Life is the same everywhere—a constant fight for existence, the repulse of hostile attacks, the overcoming of another's power; this constant struggle, attack, defence, resisting and succumbing, is carried on everywhere, only under different circumstances. It is the same with man as it is with animal and vegetable life, and it is undoubtedly only because we are not clear-sighted enough that we cannot see the same thing in the mineral world."



"Yes, yes, that may well be," interrupted Welsheim, who began to find the conversation tiresome, and thought of the horses below and the programme at the Reichshalle. "But we have something more to say to you. We were going to see the pantomime at the Reichshalle—won't you come with us? I have taken a box. Our carriage is waiting."

"Certainly—with pleasure—thanks very much. One moment."

"How many seats are there in the box?" asked Leonie.

"Six, I think. Why do you ask?"

"Just an idea—" and turning to Hugo, who had started for the other room to fetch his hat and coat, she said in a careless tone: "Who was that pretty young girl who opened the door for us and received me so pleasantly?"

Hugo felt himself growing white. He had feared this question, and had therefore hastened his departure, but now that it had come it was almost a relief.

"Miss Martha Breuer," he answered quietly. "The daughter of Mrs. Breuer, with whom I have boarded for many years."

"A nice little thing. Does not the association with such an attractive young girl sometimes



become a little—how shall I put it?—a little dangerous to you?”

“Most certainly not, my dear madame. Sooner or later I shall be able to tell you why not. Meanwhile I have special reasons for begging you not to insist upon any further explanation. Would you mind waiting a moment, please? I only want to get my hat.”

“Well, go and get it.”

As soon as Leonie was alone with Felix she whispered to him hastily: “The poor little thing looked so sad and depressed—you ought to ask her and her mother to come with us. We have room enough, surely.”

Before Welsheim, for whom Leonie had prepared surprise after surprise, could answer, Hugo entered, hat in hand and his overcoat over his arm.

“I am ready.”

“My wife thinks,” Welsheim began—but stopped abruptly as he felt Leonie’s angry gaze directed towards him—“that is, the idea is really mine, but my wife agrees with me. I thought it would give Miss Martha pleasure, and Mrs. Breuer too, of course. We have plenty of room in the box, and in case there should not be room enough in the carriage, I could take a cab at the Schloss Platz.”



Hugo had listened in bewilderment. An invitation for Martha and her mother! He saw through it all. Leonie had learned in what relation he stood to Martha, and was anxious to get a nearer view of his *fiancée*; therefore this unexpected visit which Welsheim, so clever in other respects, but, in matters which concerned his wife, childish and blinded, had made possible. "Now I must be careful to make the right move, so as not to get into any further trouble," said Hugo to himself, and with a forced smile he remarked aloud: "You are really too kind. If you will allow me I will make you acquainted at once. I hope that the ladies will accept your exceedingly kind invitation."

He not only hoped the opposite, he was sure of it.

The three stepped out into the narrow corridor. Hugo opened the door of the back room in response to the "Come in" which his knock brought forth, and said, while on the threshold:

"Have you ladies finished supper? So much the better. I wanted to make you acquainted—Mr. and Mrs. Welsheim; Mrs. Breuer, Miss Breuer."

As they bowed formally, Hugo proceeded: "We intend going to the Reichshalle. Mr. Wels-



heim has a box. We are now but three—the rest I must leave to Mr. Welsheim.”

“Pardon me, ladies, if I take the liberty—” Welsheim began somewhat hesitatingly, “but I thought the friends of our friend—it is said to be really very pretty in the Reichshalle, and if you ladies could anticipate any pleasure in the performance, we would be very happy, my wife and I, if you would pass the evening with us in our box, quite *sans gêne*.”

“We should be very happy,” Leonie said in her musical voice, in order to fill in the embarrassing pause that followed.

Mrs. Breuer looked at her daughter, upon whose pale cheeks the red spots burned like fire, and answered:

“We are deeply indebted to you, and we fully appreciate your kindness—my daughter and I—but you must see we are so illy prepared for the theatre that we must decline, though with real regret.”

“On account of your dress?” Leonie asked, brightly; “but you surely know that no one makes any display there. I happen to be too much dressed. You are in proper attire, not I. If I seem overdressed, I will drive home. In ten minutes I can have my gown changed. I can come half an hour later. It is a trifling matter.”



"I really do not know how to thank you, but we really cannot go—Is it not so, Martha?"

Martha did not give the assent her mother expected. Her heart contracted with a strange pain; something icy cold nearly took away her breath. Her nostrils quivered, her tongue was dry, and there was a bitter taste in her mouth. Her breast rose and fell. She ached in every limb. She felt plainly, "This is the woman who will steal my happiness from me." She was jealous to the verge of madness. But it gave her an incomprehensible pleasure to revel in her pain, to sharpen the pangs she suffered. She understood Leonie's desire and shared it.

To her mother's, and to Hugo's still greater surprise, she answered:

"I must confess it would give me great pleasure; and since Mr. and Mrs. Welsheim are so very kind, if you will allow me I will accept the invitation. Of course, it is not at all necessary that Mrs. Welsheim should first drive home. You must take me just as I am."

Martha and Leonie at the same instant threw a hasty side glance at Hugo. In this moment a certain unanimity existed between the two rivals. It gave them both a malicious delight to witness



Hugo's painful embarrassment, which, with all his self-control, he could not wholly master.

"But you look very charming indeed," Leonie said encouragingly, in the comfortable consciousness of her own superiority.

"If it will give you so much pleasure, I am perfectly willing that you should go," the widow replied. "But Mr. and Mrs. Welsheim must excuse me, I really cannot go."

"What a pity!" Leonie exclaimed. "But you may trust your daughter to us without the slightest fear. Of course, we will see that she reaches home safely."

Martha hurried away to the room next the kitchen, where she and her mother slept. She laid aside her apron, put on her hat without even a look in the glass, and drew on a jacket which she had bought at a bargain, a garment which made an attempt at elegance. She knew that in outward appearance she could not enter into competition with Leonie. She did not even wish to look at herself, for the contrast was too great. If she could not be beautiful as Leonie, she would not be beautiful at all. She only wanted to be tolerated.

"I am so glad for the child," Mrs. Breuer said, when Martha had left the room. "She goes out so little."



Hugo had immediately recognised the difficulty of the situation ; he felt that he must do something to simplify matters, and, turning to Leonie, he said with a smile :

“ You do not know under what deep obligations you put me by your friendliness towards Miss Martha. I will tell you, although we had agreed not to mention it as yet—but otherwise many things might appear a little strange to you—Well, you may congratulate me—I have been engaged for some time to Miss Breuer.”

“ Is it possible ! ” Welsheim exclaimed, “ and your best friends discover it only by chance ! ” He shook Hugo’s hand energetically. “ *Donnerwetter !* but you know how to keep a secret, old fellow. I wish you every happiness, with my whole heart. It gives me the greatest pleasure, I assure you—the greatest pleasure.”

He let go of Hugo’s hand at last, and turned to the widow, who in the mean time had exchanged a silent, perfunctory smile and shake of the hand with Leonie.

“ You will also permit me, Mrs. Breuer ? I am delighted to hear it.”

“ You know, my dear doctor,” Leonie said, “ that we take the most sincere interest in your happiness.”



He took the little hand she held out to him, and pressed it, but with more fervour than one usually shows in response to a congratulation, as though he would say: "Do not doubt me; I will explain everything; it remains the same between us as of old." And Leonie answered his petition, and pressed her finger-tips so deeply into the palm of his hand that he plainly felt the nails under the suède gloves. It was the first step towards a double sin.

"Here comes the little *fiancée* already," cried Welsheim as Martha entered. "Yes, my dear Miss Breuer, we know all about it. You gain a worthy, clever, talented husband. We know our doctor well. We are his best friends. I am really delighted.—And if we are half an hour late to-night, my dear Mrs. Breuer, or an hour, you must not be alarmed. Your daughter is in good hands. We cannot let this opportunity pass without drinking to the health of the two young people."

"The *fiancée* of our friend Dr. Hall may be sure of my best wishes. I congratulate you sincerely, and hope that you will soon feel at home with us."

Leonie spoke with a hypocritical smile, and reached Martha the hand that was still warm from the treachery to her.



Martha plainly felt the lie that accompanied the hand-shake; her great, glistening eyes fixed themselves revengefully and reproachfully upon Leonie, and her voice was hoarse and trembling as she answered with a forced smile, "I am very grateful to you, Mrs. Welsheim."

"But now, pardon me if I remind you that we must be going," Welsheim broke in. "Why, it is already a quarter past eight!" he proceeded, after a glance at his watch. "If we want to see anything at all, we must make haste."

The four took leave of the widow, who called after them, "Don't be too late!" whereupon Welsheim, who had already reached the first floor, laughingly answered, "To-night we are responsible for nothing"; and ten minutes later they took their places in the box—Welsheim behind Martha, Hall behind Leonie.



### CHAPTER III.

OF the four inmates of the box, one only was interested in what was going on upon the stage; that was Welsheim. The three others had something very different to attend to.

It would have been hard to conceive a greater contrast than existed between the two women who sat in the front of the box. Leonie was radiant in her brilliant toilet; she felt thoroughly at home, and, with the confidence acquired by habit, she scanned the house through her opera glasses, solely to convince herself as to whether she could be seen by any one she knew. She seemed to be satisfied: she saw only strange faces.

By the side of the brilliant society woman, Martha appeared awkward and shy, like a frightened governess who had been taken along from compassion or pity. While Leonie bent forward in a careless attitude and leaned her elbows upon the balustrade, holding her opera glasses to her eyes with her perfectly gloved hand, Martha sat as straight



upon her chair as a school-girl upon the bench, and had laid her hands upon her lap, for she had noticed that the dark-brown gloves which had seen good service had taken on a suspiciously light shade at the finger-tips. Her neighbour's magnificent gown touched her old, dark woollen dress. As hateful as the sight was to her, she could not help admiring the costliness of the material and the beautiful harmonious shades. Sighing softly, she raised her eyes, and a feeling of envy came over her as she watched the woman sitting by her in well-bred carelessness—the rich mantle, which had slipped down a little, showing the graceful curves of the shoulders; and the coquettish hat which rested so lightly on the tastefully arranged hair. Ye gods! That small hat cost more than Martha would dare to expend for a whole year's outfit. And those magnificent diamonds that glittered in the small ears, and that mass of gardenias at her breast with their sensuous, overpowering fragrance. Yes, this woman had every cause to be gay and smiling. She was happy, rich, admired. She was the picture of luxury and of health.

How pitiful poor Martha appeared by her side in her sombre poverty! She had demanded too much of herself. She felt degraded, ashamed, unhappy in the extreme, powerless against a rival



whose quiver was full, and who possessed in her arsenal weapons of unattainable superiority.

What Martha had suspected now became a certainty. She could no longer have any doubts but that Hugo, whom she had thought to possess alone, was wholly in the toils of this arrogant woman with the restless blue eyes.

How intensely she hated this Leonie, who no longer took the trouble to simulate the slightest friendliness or even a superficial interest in her, and seemed to have forgotten her existence; who made use of the orchestra's loud playing to whisper her blandishments to Hugo in an openly shameless manner, smiling innocently the while, and manœuvring skilfully with her fan! Yes, they *were* blandishments that Leonie whispered to him as she leaned back in her chair and turned her head towards him. Martha listened with feverish intentness, but she could only hear a few disconnected sounds and the loud beating of her own heart, which sent the blood coursing through her frail body, and started the pulses throbbing at the wrists, at the throat, and at the temples.

What had they to say to each other? What were they talking about?

"You have been playing a contemptible farce with me; there is no other word for it. And now



that you cannot be dangerous to me any longer, I will tell you frankly that you *have been*. For I have foolishly believed that you loved me. What have you really meant by your attentions? Did you think, forsooth, that I am one of those women whom a man can take up at his pleasure? Then you have erred in me. I am not as frivolous as I seem."

The house resounded with loud applause, bestowed upon the perilous leaps of a young girl, who flew from one swaying trapeze to another. Welsheim was entirely carried away by the grace and confidence of the young artiste, and Hugo applauded too, as he bent forward, and said in a trembling voice: "I have never deceived you either in word or deed. I have never thought of underestimating you! The frivolity which you attribute to me is far from me. What I have been through since I have known you I cannot tell you—here least of all. Perhaps you will confess, some time, that you have done me a great injustice."

"And your *fiancée*?"

"I cannot speak of it now; it is impossible. I am not avoiding an explanation. On the contrary, I earnestly beg you to give me an opportunity of making one."



The popular Vienna songstress now appeared, greeted by the applause of the *habitués* of the place. She was tall and fine-looking—no longer young, but with youthful movements, and gay and sprightly in appearance. She harped on the beauties of Vienna in every variation. During the song, which was attentively listened to by the public, the conversation between Hugo and Leonie ceased. Hugo made use of this opportunity to speak a few indifferent words to Martha, who looked frightfully pale. She was injured to the quick by his neglect. Without understanding what the two were whispering about, she knew quite well that a shameful conspiracy was commenced against her. She was almost beside herself with excitement, and made an abrupt, repellent motion as Hugo spoke to her. It infuriated her to have a sop thrown to her now.

During the next number on the programme—Japanese acrobats and jugglers—the music was again so loud that Hugo's interrupted speech could be resumed.

“I perfectly understand that you must have a false opinion of me,” he said, stroking his beard to conceal his lips with his hand. “I am very glad that all has happened as it has, for now I shall have the courage to tell you something that



has been burning into my soul. I will and must succeed in clearing up the mystery."

"I scarcely think so."

"You must give me a hearing. When can I see you—undisturbed?"

Leonie fanned herself and looked at the stage.

"I beg you to tell me when and where?"

"To-morrow noon at half past twelve, at my house," Leonie answered, waving her fan as slowly as before, and without turning her eyes from the stage.

Martha gave a hard, dry cough. She had heard Leonie's answer. It cut her to the heart, and again the unnatural flush dyed her pale cheeks. She pressed her handkerchief to her mouth to suppress the sound of the violent coughing. When she took it away it was stained with blood. She alone saw it, and a smile of unutterable sadness parted her lips.

"That is a very bad cold," Welsheim remarked compassionately. "Perhaps we can find some pastilles at the confectioners. At any rate they'll have bonbons."

He started to get up.

"I beg you not to trouble yourself," Martha answered. "It is already past."



Her voice sounded so strangely hollow that even Hugo remarked it.

“You seem to be really ill. Can I do anything for you?”

“Take me to a cab. I am very sorry to disturb you,” she added, turning more towards Welsheim than towards Leonie. “But I must beg you to pardon my going. It is too warm here, and there is too much smoke for me. My lungs are not strong, and I have to be careful. It is still early, and I shall be at home before eleven. I have only one request: do not trouble yourself on my account.”

She had already risen.

“That is not to be thought of!” Welsheim exclaimed. “We have promised your mother—our carriage—”

Martha had pushed by Welsheim, and with the words, “Pray excuse me,” she had reached the door. Her departure was so sudden that they supposed that she had been taken unexpectedly ill. She left the box with a hasty bow. Hugo had risen, seized his hat, and saying, “I hope to be back in a few moments, and to bring her with me—it is of no consequence—it will soon pass over,” he followed her.

Welsheim also prepared to leave the box.



"You are not going to leave me here alone?" Leonie said. "You heard him say that it was nothing serious."

In case of emergency, Hugo took a check at the door, so as to be on the safe side.

Martha knew quite well that she would not be able to control herself if she remained with Hugo, and she did not wish to betray herself.

"Let me go home alone," she begged, as they stood before the cab, whose driver leisurely prepared himself for the trip. "I feel quite well again now that I am in the open air. You will do me a favour by not accompanying me."

"But that is impossible! You must see—"

"Why should it be impossible? The house will not be closed, and you will please me by making no objections. I should much prefer to be alone at present."

"But, Martha—"

"Do not torment me any longer. Your friends will not doubt for a moment but that you would willingly come with me. They will understand that you have followed my express wish. There, I beg, not a word more— Driver, Brüder Strasse."

She drew the cab door to and waved her hand to Hugo as the horse started off at a jog trot. Then she threw herself back and wept and sobbed



so violently that her whole body was convulsed—wept for him whom she had lost.

Happily the widow had already put out the light when Martha cautiously entered the bedroom. The mother woke from her half sleep.

“Back already? What has happened?”

“Nothing, mamma. The air in the theatre was so stifling and bad that I did not want to stay, on account of my stupid cough. And, besides, it was tiresome. Hugo came home with me. Pleasant dreams, mamma. Good night.”

She bent over her mother and kissed her. Then she undressed without lighting the lamp. When she got into bed she buried her face in the pillows and pulled the coverings up over her so as to cry unnoticed. Her mother had fallen asleep again, as she knew by her regular breathing.

Hugo did not like to remember that Martha did not need to urge him very strongly not to accompany her home. It strengthened the impulse to return to Leonie. It was a very good thing that he had taken a check.

A smile of satisfaction flitted across Leonie's lips as Hugo returned to the box. He explained in an awkward and shamefaced manner that Martha had insisted on his return. She felt quite well again, and had only feared the tobacco-smoke.



She had driven home in good spirits, and had commissioned him to thank them for her, and to give Mrs. Welsheim her kindest regards.

Leonie closed her eyes in recognition of the message.

It was impossible for Hugo to recover his former frame of mind. An inexplicable power had driven him into Leonie's presence. But now that he could almost touch her when he rested his arm on the back of her chair, that he saw her before him in all her perfect charm, and breathed in the bewildering perfume of the gardenias at her breast, now that his longing was stilled and that he dared talk to her without the former restraint—for Welsheim had neither ears nor eyes for anything but what was taking place on the stage—he was silent, mastered by a feeling of deep depression that he could not shake off. He thought of Martha driving back to her joyless home, alone, in that rickety cab. He no longer tried to excuse his conduct. He told himself that he had acted in an inexcusable manner towards the poor sick child whom he had robbed of her peace of mind. If any wrong had been begun, it was entirely his fault, and he alone had to atone for it. He did not dare confess the truth to her that he did not love her as he had convinced himself and her: it would



break her heart. He credited himself with enough strength of will to keep the truth always concealed from her. She should not suffer, poor child! And who knew but that just Fate would reward him in the end for his heroism, and make him happy in the fulfilment of his moral duty? He would love Martha in a very different way from what he had once dreamed of loving, but perhaps not less. His decision was made: he would withdraw from Leonie's fatal influence, much as he would suffer thereby. From now on his life belonged wholly to the duties which he had undertaken towards Martha. To be sure, he would have a hard battle to fight—all the more noble the victory. He had only himself, only his own desires, to overcome. He knew that Leonie was too proud to make any effort to hold him back, when he had decided to go. He needed only to intimate to her that he felt uneasy in his conscience—that he regarded further association with her as a treachery to his affianced wife—to be certain to receive his dismissal. As yet they had sinned but in thought, there were no chains to break which they had forged. It was still possible for them to meet each other in after-life without letting their eyes fall—for them to laugh over what had happened as a pleasing folly of youth.



There was no other way. He did not try to delude himself into thinking that Leonie's withdrawal from his life would not create a frightful void. As susceptible as he was to outward appearances, it was not Leonie's peculiar beauty that had drawn him to her. It was her keen appreciation of his efforts, her sincere sympathy in his work, her constant stimulation and encouragement. He frankly confessed to himself that he could never have written the play which was nearing its completion without her constant co-operation during the last few weeks. He felt the strongest impulse to read her every line that he wrote down. She never made a commonplace observation, and all her criticisms were keen and to the point. She knew how to give the most pleasing and clever expression to her thoughts, she understood how to find fault without hurting his vanity. Her praise was as warm as the sunshine; his association with her was a constant incitement.

Hugo did not suspect that Martha could sympathise with his work just as truly and perhaps more deeply. Martha's vocabulary was very imperfect, and she was awkward in the expression of any of her feelings. She did not dare to blame, she did not know how to praise. She listened to him attentively with her unnaturally brilliant eyes,



smiled with satisfaction or embarrassment, kept silent or spoke only commonplaces, and so a feeling of depression crept over Hugo whenever he read aloud to her some scene that he had just finished. While from Leonie he hurried back to his desk with increased enthusiasm in his work, Martha weighed him down like lead, Leonie gave him wings. So it had come about that for some time Hugo had entirely given up reading his work aloud to Martha, while Leonie had become the spur to the most gladsome energy.

But be that as it might, he had now to put an end to it all, since he had recognised the fact that he could no longer carry on this impossible and insupportable double play, but must act towards Martha as an honourable man should. He did not despair of educating Martha in time, and of raising her to his level.

All this passed through Hugo's brain as he sat behind Leonie, sober and silent—silent for several moments that seemed an eternity to Leonie.

Without being able to see Hugo's face, she divined what was going on in his mind; nevertheless she wanted to convince herself of the accuracy of her conjectures, with a secret hope that she might be mistaken.



"Since we must give up the pleasure of having Miss Breuer with us to-night," she cautiously began, "our little celebration after the performance has scarcely any further object. The *raison d'être* is wanting. I think we had better postpone the festivities until another day."

"Give up the festivities, so far as I am concerned," Welsheim interrupted, "but there is no reason why we should not take a glass of wine together in some cosy corner."

Hugo was silent.

"What do you think?" Welsheim asked.

"I cannot very well decide against Mrs. Welsheim," Hugo answered dryly.

Leonie grew a little pale; she pressed her lips together and her nostrils dilated. Then she had not been mistaken, after all! What would he not have done before—yesterday, even—to have remained with her an hour or two longer! And now that it was only necessary for him to speak one word, he was silent, and strove to escape through the opening she had made for him.

After a short pause, Leonie again took up the conversation.

"Besides, I must confess that my curiosity is satisfied. I think we had better go."

Hugo was again silent.



"But the best is still to come—the pantomime!" Welsheim interrupted.

Leonie waited a second to see if Hall would speak. As he persisted in his silence, she said with assumed fatigue:

"I feel rather tired; I should prefer—"

"If you do not feel well—of course your wish is law to me; but if it is not too much to ask I should like to watch the pantomime."

Now, at last, Hugo spoke:

"Since Mrs. Welsheim seems to be fatigued, we certainly shall not miss much if we give up the pantomime. It is always the same old story—cudgelling, kicking, tumbling."

"Then we will go," Leonie said, rising impatiently.

Welsheim succumbed to the inevitable and followed his wife, to whom Hugo had offered his arm.

"Then I am to see you to-morrow at half-past twelve?" he whispered, as they descended the steps.

Leonie slowly closed her eyes in assent.

Welsheim's invitation to make use of their carriage Hall declined. He said he wished first to look up a friend or two, whom he was sure of finding in a neighbouring restaurant.



Leonie feigned a headache, as she always did when she did not wish to talk.

When the husband and wife reached home, where they found supper awaiting them in the small dining-room only used on the rare occasions when they had no guests, Leonie begged her husband to excuse her if she did not keep him company, for she really felt ill and wished to retire at once. She added hastily that Felix need have absolutely no cause for worry. A few hours and she would be all right again. She raised her forehead for her husband to kiss, and went immediately to her bedroom which adjoined his. She closed the connecting door.

Germaine had taken her mistress's hat and mantle and was awaiting her further orders. It was a spacious room, overlooking the garden and decorated in light colours. Even the furniture was fashioned out of white maple. The wide bed stood in a deep recess partitioned off by sliding curtains of the same delicate silken fabric as the low cushioned chairs. At the foot of the bed was a couch with thick, soft, luxurious cushions and an eider-down quilt, as light as a feather, thrown over the end. There Leonie was accustomed to take her afternoon nap behind the half-drawn curtains. Opposite, between the windows, stood a large



— dressing-table, with a tall glass in the centre reaching to the floor ; on either side were big and little boxes and cases, some closed, the others open, containing trifles without number : gloves, fans, handkerchiefs, fichus, the simple ornaments which she generally wore, letters too, and all kinds of memoranda, light literature—in a word, everything imaginable. On either side of the glass was a three-branched candelabrum, the tapers now being lighted, for Leonie liked the brightness of day at all hours.

She had sat awhile on the divan and was gazing almost blankly at the bunches of roses on the velvety carpet. She rose with an effort and motioned to Germaine, who was standing bolt upright in a corner and was endeavouring not to betray her presence by so much as a breath.

While she was disrobing her mistress, Germaine ventured to remark, good-naturedly :

“Madame should never wear anything but light dresses. Madame looks too beautiful to-night.”

Leonie smiled wearily.

“Madame seems worn out. Perhaps madame would like a cup of tea ? It does so much good. And it is still early—hardly eleven.” As she was speaking she folded the gown caressingly and car-



ried it to the adjoining dressing-room to hang it up in the gigantic wardrobe.

Leonie had not answered.

Germaine had returned and knelt before her mistress, drawing off the dainty shoes and replacing them with a pair of slippers.

"Shall I bring madame a cup of tea?" repeated Germaine.

"No, thank you; you may go."

Germaine's face assumed an expression of blank astonishment.

"Will madame loosen her hair herself?"

"Yes. Good night."

"Shall I not at least put out the lights by the mirror?"

"I will do it myself."

"I hope madame will have a good night's rest," said Germaine in perplexity. As she closed the door after her she shook her head. It was all so very unusual! "Ach Gott!" she sighed uneasily, and betook herself thoughtfully to her room.

Leonie remained a long time, half dressed, sitting on the low couch. She felt a strange heaviness in her head, a dull stupor, a general discomfort. She thought of no one particular thing—she seemed to be entangled in a chaotic dream. A heavy wrinkle imprinted itself more and more



deeply on her forehead, extending vertically from between the dark brows to the border of the hair.

At last she rose with an effort and went with languid steps to her boudoir without throwing on the dressing-gown which Germaine had laid in readiness. She seated herself before the looking-glass without examining herself more closely, as was usual with her. She took one hairpin after the other out of the heavy, soft dark hair, which hung down in wavy masses and fell in soft curls around the bared neck and shoulders. Then she threw back her head, shaking it until the luxuriant hair enveloped her like a mantle. She did not notice how beautiful she was now. She put out the candles indifferently and returned to the bedroom. She seated herself once more on the couch and fell again into her joyless brooding.

Gradually her thoughts took shape. Out of the vague uncertainty there stepped a figure, clear and sharply defined—Hugo !

The familiar intercourse, the constant intellectual communion with him had become customary with her. She had come to look upon it as a matter of course that she should see Hugo almost daily, should talk over all that interested him and that concerned herself—things of which they could



—speak to no one else; that she should gently repel his advances, which at times became almost violent, with a feigned sisterliness and friendship. Hugo belonged to her and her existence more than did any other. And now she was brought face to face with the probability of losing him. Yes, the probability! A wicked smile played about her mouth, over the ingratitude of men. She was quite right in treating them all like so many puppets, her only mistake had been in making an exception in favour of this one. He was no better than the rest of them.

Yes, truly, the best of them all was her own husband, who was happy when he could read a wish in her eyes which was in his power to gratify. If he had not been her husband, the proofs of his affection might have touched her. But that she had been given to him for weal or woe, as an ignorant child, that she belonged to him without love, *that* was what she could not forgive him, what revolted her, what filled her with repulsion—yes, which even roused a feeling of disgust. She now felt that the purity of her relations with Hugo had become an indispensable ideal counterpoise against her husband's lawfully acquired intimacy, which now seemed to her a horrible infidelity. She had need of a sympathetic friend to be able to breathe



in the presence of the unloved husband. That she did not love Felix was first brought forcibly upon her when Hugo approached her. And for this knowledge, painful though it was, she was thankful from the depths of her soul. Gladly did she put up with his humours and his constant outbursts of jealousy. What would become of her if she should lose him ?

Must it then really be ? Could it be ?

She lifted her head, which had gradually sunk lower and lower in her sorrowful meditation, and her eyes accidentally caught sight of her reflection in the glass. It made such an impression upon her that she looked more intently in the mirror than before. The woman whom she saw there in the blaze of light on the soft cushions, bending slightly forward, with thick, unbound hair that happened to fall so as to leave the right shoulder and beautiful arm uncovered—yes, the woman was fair and to be coveted.

She rose and went quite close to the glass. She smiled and shook the heavy natural mantle with a childish pleasure.

Must she then really lose Hugo ? Could it be ? Terribly startled, she shrank together with a low cry. The door opened and Welsheim appeared on the threshold. With a spring she fled to the



recess and flung the dressing-gown over her in feverish haste.

"Why, what does this mean?" he asked in the greatest astonishment. "I supposed you to be sound asleep an hour ago, and when I came carefully to my room I saw a glimmer of light."

"How can you frighten me so!" cried Leonie indignantly. "I am shaking all over," and in rising anger she continued: "It is preposterous that a woman cannot have a place as big as her hand where she can be free from intrusion at any hour of the day or night."

Leonie had never before allowed herself to be carried to such a pitch of violence against Felix. Until now she had passed over everything with coolness and indifference.

Welsheim looked quite abashed at the white figure half concealed behind the curtains.

"Pardon me," he stammered, completely taken aback, "but it is quite natural that I should come in. You complained of not feeling well. I saw a light. I became uneasy and entered. It is perfectly natural."

"Well, yes," admitted Leonie, "but you startled me horribly. I was lying on the couch until now, I felt so badly. I was just about to retire when you entered."



"Pardon me. And how are you now?"

"Better, thank you."

"Ah, then, I trust you will sleep well."

"I must ask you to leave me. I am ready to faint with exhaustion."

"Good night, then," murmured Felix, kissing her.

"Good night," answered Leonie, and drew a deep breath as Felix set her free.

"Shall I put out the lights?"

"No, thank you, I shall let them burn. Good night."

"Good night."

When Felix had closed the door behind him, Leonie shuddered. She undressed hastily and noiselessly, as though she feared to remind her husband in the next room of her presence; left the candles burning, and did not take the pains to put up her hair. She drew the curtains so close that no ray of light penetrated, and slipped into bed.

A few moments longer, she lay there with beating heart, then she gradually grew calmer and dropped asleep.

At a comparatively early hour—much earlier than Martha had expected—the poor, feverish child



heard the key in the hall door. Hugo had returned immediately to the house from the Reichshalle.

“Thank God!” she sighed softly, and pressed her hand against her left side as though to subdue the violent beating of her heart.



## CHAPTER IV.

THE following morning it was with real solicitude that Hugo inquired how Martha felt.

"Oh, I am quite well again," she said, but her startling pallor and the dark rings under her eyes belied her words. "Do not tell mother," she whispered hastily, "that I drove home alone."

"I have to reproach myself seriously for not having come with you."

"It was better so."

"It was not right," replied Hugo, lowering his eyes.

"Did you enjoy yourselves afterwards?"

"Mrs. Welsheim broke up the party shortly after, and I was not sorry. I came home to you immediately."

"Yes, I was still awake; I heard you come in."

"Do you like the Welsheims? We must call there within the next few days."

"If you think—"

"They are pleasant people, and if you come to know them more intimately—"



"I have no doubt about their being pleasant. I am only afraid that we will hardly suit each other. They are very rich—I am poor. Don't think me vain if I say that the splendour of the fine lady makes me ashamed of myself."

"I understand that perfectly. The incongruity between the life the Welsheims lead and the existence allotted to us has been, indeed, the principal reason for my not having brought about your meeting before. I was not thinking of an intimate friendship. I had only the regard to social duties in view."

"I will do what you think right. Have you any particular plans for to-day?" asked Martha with complete self-possession.

"Nothing particular," Hugo returned. "I must go out for a short time about noon."

Martha looked at him quietly, but betrayed nothing of what was going on within her.

"I have an appointment with a friend whom I met last night," Hugo felt induced to add.

"Last night?" repeated Martha, "but you told me that you came straight home from the Reichshalle."

Hugo hid the embarrassment which he felt at being detected in a lie, under feigned gaiety.

"You are cross-questioning me like an inquis-



itor. When I said yesterday, I meant day before yesterday, of course. But why do you ask?"

"I wanted to ask you to take a walk with me. The weather is so lovely, and I think it would do me good."

"I shall be at your disposal the entire afternoon."

"Never mind," answered Martha without the least show of bitterness. "I longed particularly for the midday sun. If you can not go with me, I may go alone. Besides, I have some few errands to do. I must buy some embroidery silks and wools, exchange some music—"

"You could do that equally well in the afternoon."

"We have plenty of time to talk it over," smiled Martha.

It was hard for Hugo to refuse to gratify Martha on account of his prearranged meeting with Leonie. The first lie came hard, and it was awkwardly enough acted out. He slipped out of his rooms as noiselessly as possible. This caution was quite superfluous. There was no danger to be feared from Martha's hearing him. She had already left the house a quarter of an hour before, with equal caution.

From a casual remark that Welsheim had let



fall the evening before she had gathered that they lived on the Victoria Strasse. She had looked it up in the directory to convince herself that she had heard aright. She took the first street car that would carry her to the Potsdam Bridge. It was nearly a quarter of one when she turned into the Victoria Strasse. She went slowly by the house where the hated woman awaited her lover. If he should meet her—what did it matter? Should he sink through the ground for shame; should the consciousness of the wrong done her bring about a final rupture—she was prepared for anything. She wished to know the truth at any cost; she would allow herself to be deceived no longer. This was her one desire, and pride, which had entirely overmastered this girl, usually so gentle and patient, had given her the strength to accomplish it. She went slowly the whole length of the street to the Thiergarten, then she crossed to the other side and turned around. She again examined the house with feverish interest. Although the curtains and heavy draperies prevented a sight of the interior, she gazed up with wide-opened eyes, and her imagination drew aside the closely drawn curtains. She saw the superb rooms far more fairy-like and seductive than they were in reality, and she saw outstretched upon the divan a woman of unnatural



beauty, with magnificent dark hair and remarkable eyes, such as are attributed to the fabulous creatures of the sea—saw how she held out her arms in longing.

Martha's heart beat to suffocation. The forbidding picture which her fevered imagination had conjured up before her vanished in an instant, to give place to one of reality still more repellent. She saw, hardly fifty paces from her, on the opposite side of the street, where Welsheim's house stood, Hugo, who approached with moderately rapid steps, and, after a glance at his watch, hastened his pace. He had not seen Martha. With a sudden resolve she crossed the small garden of the house before which she was standing and rang the bell. The door was opened, but she stood before it for a few moments. She had convinced herself. Hugo had entered.

The portress, who had stuck her head through the slide, replied in the negative to Martha's question if a Mrs. Councillor Breuer lived there, but added that a councillor's wife lived next door, but whether her name was Breuer or not she did not know. Martha thanked her and left.

Although she had only seen what she had been perfectly sure of seeing, now that the expected had happened she was stunned. With a dulled brain



she went through the Thiergarten, filled with a gay throng on this mild spring afternoon—under the lindens—slowly home, almost without consciousness, without a glance at her surroundings, without knowing whither her steps were leading her. She was quite surprised when she found that she had reached home. She told her mother that she had been unable to change her music at the dealer's. The beautiful weather had induced her to take a little walk. But she had overrated her powers. A sudden exhaustion had seized her. It was with difficulty that she had crept home. She now felt so worn out that she would go and lie down awhile in the little room next the kitchen.

Mrs. Breuer pitied the poor child, put a pillow under her head, spread a shawl over her, and drew down the green window-shade. Then she went out of the room carefully. Martha gazed fixedly at the tasteless design on the shade—an enamoured couple in mediæval attire, feeding swans from an impossible balcony overlooking a sky-blue lake. She stared at the picture which she had seen a thousand times before without ever having noticed it in particular. Now for the first time she appreciated its absurdity and crudity. Thus she lay there for a long time with straining eyes, staring at the childish painted group. She was incapa-



ble of grasping a thought. Neither did she have any feeling—not even was she conscious of the sensation of pain which drew her hand involuntarily to her left side and kept it pressed tightly there.

. . . . .

Martha had been correct in her mental picture of her rival's appearance.

Hugo was completely taken aback when he was shown to the small boudoir, adjoining the bow-window drawing-room, and stood in Leonie's presence.

"You must excuse me if I receive you in this way," she said calmly, seating herself on the sofa and motioning Hugo to take the nearest chair. "I made a mistake in the hour, and was not quite through with my toilet. I did not wish to keep you waiting."

Remembering the picture that the mirror had shown her the night before, she had not dressed her hair, which fell again in wonderful, shining waves below her waist. Hugo gazed in honest admiration at the beauty and thickness of this hair.

He saw for the first time the beautiful outlines of the head which had hitherto been hidden by the fashionable style of hair-dressing. Leonie wore a



morning gown of creamy cashmere of Oriental cut, with wide sleeves, which at every motion left bare half of the arm and more. Around her waist was tied a thick tasseled cord of the same colour.

Hugo looked silently at the lovely woman beside him. Never before had he seen her so seductively bewitching. He was silent so long that Leonie was obliged to begin anew.

“I have done as you wished. We shall not be disturbed. Felix is at the Exchange. I have denied myself to all callers. What have you to say to me?”

“I implore you to listen to me with forbearance. And do not be impatient. I will be as brief as possible. I sought your acquaintance—I own it frankly—out of curiosity. I had heard much of your house, and your talents as a hostess. I wanted to watch you and your guests—wanted to learn from you—if I amused myself at the same time, so much the better. I was then already engaged. For material reasons, Miss Breuer and I had agreed not to announce the engagement until immediately before the wedding should take place. I had no cause, had not even the right to speak of it to you, at that time.”

“At that time!—but go on—”

“You know with what inconceivable rapidity



we were drawn towards each other. When I had met you twice, three times, I had talked of things with you which are only spoken of in closest intimacy. My trust in you was boundless. I felt the strongest necessity to let you look into the inmost recesses of my soul. Never before had I known such perfect sympathy. Why should I mince matters? I was in love with you. I was untrue in my heart to Martha. If you had given me proofs of your love—you have not done so—I fought with myself. Should I tell her the truth? It would have killed her, the poor, frail child. And perhaps I was mistaken in my feelings, after all. Perhaps it was only a passing delirium. Perhaps your undisturbed calm would bring me to my senses. I had not the courage to deal the poor child such a deadly blow. And should I tell *you?* ”

“Yes!”

“No! For I loved you to madness. I could not breathe without you—you had repulsed my wooing as a lover, you only permitted me to admire you as a friend.”

“Ah, indeed!” Leonie broke in with a bitter laugh, “and the friend had no claim on your confidence! Do you not know how pitiable your arguments are, how they twist and turn? You



give your *fiancée* to believe that you love her. You do everything in your power to make me believe that you love me! Lies here, lies there! And now you wish to persuade me that it is all perfectly proper? You need not make any further attempt. And if you will permit me to offer you one last piece of advice it is this: have at least the courage to tell Miss Breuer that it is all over between you. You have given me plainly enough to understand that you would have sacrificed her if I had acknowledged my love for you."

"If you had done so," cried Hugo, angered at Leonie's contemptuous tone—"yes, what would have happened then—I really do not know! But you have not. You have been a friend to me in the truest sense of the word—a sympathetic, helpful friend for whom I shall always be grateful, no matter what happens. What, then, do you wish? If you are my friend, then you can see no rival in Miss Breuer. That I have concealed my engagement from you may perhaps surprise, annoy, possibly even hurt you but you have no right to reproach me with lying and deceit."

"I have been an exacting friend, as you know, my dear; I have exacted everything of you—all your affection, all your thoughts, your whole heart. And in return I have given you everything—



everything that belonged to me—my soul! What no longer belonged to me I have failed, it is true, to take from him to whom it belongs, to give it secretly to you as a thief to a receiver of stolen goods. It is this which you reproach me for, and which, in your moral conception, justifies you in having concealed for many long months what was burning on your lips—what, as you knew quite well, you would have to tell me sooner or later. Do not fence with empty words. Your engagement was a treachery to me, your friendship a treachery to her.”

“I have sinned towards her, I admit. Yes! I will tell her truthfully, and she will forgive me.”

“What!” cried Leonie in horror. “You will delude the poor, foolish thing with your sophistries? Will you serve up that childish fable of a passing infatuation, which construction you have just put upon your guilty embarrassment? Do you wish to make her believe that you have erred? Do you wish to play the penitent sinner who has found the right way to her heart again? You ought to be ashamed— If you have ever loved me— I do not know. I had thought so. But that you do not love that pale girl, I know as surely as I know that you now fill me with abhorrence. Go!”



She had risen, and Hugo also started to his feet. Hatred and anger flashed from her eyes. Everything rebelled in her at the thought that he had flung off the bonds that had held him to her, and was about to return to that sickly, insignificant creature. Ah! the simple thing, completely infatuated with him, would believe him and forgive him at the first kiss! He would bring her to reason with little trouble. There was a horrible tumult in Leonie's breast—her heart contracted—she was almost beside herself with jealousy. She gave a mirthless laugh as she caught him looking towards his hat. He would go as she had commanded him! He could leave her like this!

“You drive me away. I must obey. If I ever see you again—”

Leonie shook her head violently, till the dark curls played around it in wonderful beauty.

“Never!” she exclaimed, almost with a scream.

“And I must part from you like this? Without one word of thanks for all—”

Leonie again shook the dark, rippling mass.

“Go!” she repeated, this time in a low voice.  
“I hate you!”

They stood close together. The intoxicating perfume of her glorious hair clouded Hugo's senses. He heard her rapid breathing and felt



her quick breath. He looked at her. A painful frown contracted her forehead. A reproachful look, full of sadness and infinite tenderness, met his, and touched him to the depths of his heart. And this look kindled the slumbering fire which he, poor fool, had fondly imagined he had smothered, and it burst out again in a still fiercer flame. He thought of nothing in the whole wide world but of the beautiful woman almost touching him. He had forgotten everything—all the cruel, cutting words he had just heard, all the good resolves he had brought with him. It seemed to him that an invisible band was compressing his head. She remained motionless. He smiled strangely. But when he put his arm about her and gently drew her close to his heart, and held her fast, her head sank back inertly, and she trembled and shivered like the hunted deer that sees no escape.

Then she smiled under his caresses, and answered with half-opened lips and half-closed eyes, happy and forgiving.

“Now you know that I love you,” she whispered in his ear.

“Yes.”

“And you love me, too—me alone?”

“You alone. You know it.”

“Yes,” came in a scarcely audible whisper.



But in spirit there rose before them the shadowy figure of a pale, fragile girl with brilliant eyes. But she faded away in the blaze of sunshine which glorified them, like a phantom spirit in the soft spring light.

Martha's name was never mentioned again between them.



## CHAPTER V.

IN the fall of the year 1873 the circles of Berlin society particularly interested in theatrical matters talked of nothing but the new play, the first performance of which was to take place shortly. It bore the title of "Hercules and Omphale," and the playwright was Dr. Hugo Hall.

Hall had been the subject of unusual comment in the Thiergarten society. All the world knew that the young author stood on the most intimate terms with the clever and brilliant Mrs. Felix Welsheim—all the world except the fortunate Mr. Felix Welsheim, who was doing great things on the Exchange, and was proud of his beautiful wife and his splendid house.

Leonie and Hugo had at first taken the greatest pains to conceal the guilty truth from the world. In this they succeeded. But as time went on they gained confidence, and committed this or that trifling imprudence, which noticed by one, related to another, soon assumed a significant meaning. People put



these trifles and open facts together; everything in general and particular was easily explained as soon as the existence of a love affair between the two was presupposed. And so the report was spread, the truth of which no man could longer doubt.

People saw Leonie and Hugo constantly together, saw how they exchanged glances of understanding and intelligence. Those who were more intimate at the Welsheims observed that all who were distasteful to Dr. Hall were slighted by Leonie, and finally disappeared from the drawing-rooms. It was also noticeable that Leonie had changed, in a certain sense to her advantage. If she could not quite give up flirting—it was innate in her—she did not carry it to such an extreme as before. She had become more scrupulous, for she felt herself under strict surveillance. But the most compromising of all was her active furtherance of Hall's play. Any one whom she thought could either help or harm the piece, she treated with particular attention, and handled with all the arts of feminine diplomacy until she had brought the person in question to a favourable state of mind.

She took the truest, warmest, heartiest interest in the play which had grown up under her eyes. She was convinced of its greatness, and looked for a startling success. She considered the plot—the



subduing of the strong man by the frail woman—to be conceived with true dramatic power, and carried out thoroughly in the modern spirit.

When, some two months after the first secret kiss, Hugo read her the closing act, she had flung herself impetuously on his neck, had drawn him passionately to her and cried, "I am proud of you!" She took the manuscript away from him, because he seemed too careless. Welsheim had been obliged to make inquiries everywhere, and to drive all over the city to find an experienced copyist to whom one could safely confide the treasure. She had promised the man a large compensation if he would take the work in hand immediately and strain every nerve towards its completion. She had the neatly copied pages brought to her, sheet by sheet, and her exultation grew with every moment. She made Hugo write to the general superintendent, Mr. von Hülfen, several days before the completed manuscript was in his hands. She had found ways and means of preparing the manager in chief and the principal reader for the coming event, and induced them to promise it an early reading.

At the end of June, "Hercules and Omphale" was handed in. Three days later came the glad news—accepted! She had not expected anything else,



but still she was almost too happy; and in honour of the day she allowed her husband to give her a beautiful bracelet for which she had long wished.

Her enthusiasm about the play had infected Felix. Welsheim, the cleverest and sharpest head on 'change, who rejoiced in the most well-deserved respect in the business world, who showed the keenest penetration in all questions of practical life, was simple as a child in the hands of his wife. She could do with him what she chose. She made him think that in everything which she might have done, it was he who had taken the initiative. She made him dance like a puppet on a string, while he serenely supposed he was the head of the house, and possessed an unusually yielding and submissive wife who followed his commands to the letter. He had the blindest faith in her. He liked Hugo, and when he did not see him for several days—for Hugo selected hours when the husband was at the Exchange or in his office—he became uneasy and inquired for him.

Welsheim, of course, had not heard Hall's play read, but he was all enthusiasm for it.

Hugo's relations with Leonie had given the doctor a certain prominence in society. Many, who had never read a line of his, now treated him



with a certain flattering attention. The lover of the beautiful Leonie Welsheim, for whose position so many had striven eagerly but in vain, was no ordinary mortal.

"There is Dr. Hall," one would whisper to another.

"Mrs. Welsheim's lover?"

"So they say."

"Where?"

"There—not far from the door. He is just speaking to her."

"Ah, yes; now I see him. A handsome man."

"Very, and he must be clever, too."

No clouds darkened the sky of this threefold union. Welsheim was contented, Leonie and Hugo were happy. With a remarkable philosophy, Leonie had resigned herself to her lover being bound to another. She knew that he loved her, and troubled herself not at all about her wretched, insignificant rival. She smiled now when she thought of her ever having been foolish enough to be enraged over a girl like this Martha. She had almost entirely forgotten the poor, sick child in the back room in the Brüder Strasse.

Between Hugo and Leonie there was a mutual and silent agreement to banish the vexed question of his engagement entirely from their conversa-



tion. Leonie had the settled conviction that she would never again be disturbed by it.

Martha had accepted the situation less easily. She had returned from that journey to the Victoria Strasse, which she had undertaken that spring day to convince herself of Hugo's infidelity, with a severe illness and a high fever, which kept her confined to her bed for three weeks.

Hugo inquired three and four times a day as to her condition. He was sorry for her. But he was revelling in the delight of his blissful perfidy. All his thoughts and feelings were centred in Leonie and in the third act of his play, which was nearing completion. There was little left for Martha. He was glad when, in answer to his regular question, "And how is Martha?" he received the invariable reply, "A little better, thank God!" He repeated, "Thank God!" and returned, relieved and light-hearted, to his desk—or to his Leonie.

Martha's bodily weakness was a mental strengthening to her. She had ample time to think the matter over in the long hours of daylight, and in the sleepless hours of the interminable nights.

How many moving, eloquent speeches she thought over which would show him the baseness



of his conduct, and which would bring him back penitent to her once more! How many affecting letters she had written him in her mind, which must impress him, touch him, shame him!

But poor Martha belonged to that unfortunate class of people whose strength fails them on the road leading from resolve to action, whose feelings are deep and noble but whose power of expression is awkward and commonplace. She knew perfectly well what she wished to say, but what she actually said fell far short of what she had intended to say, and not until it was too late did she remember the speeches she had planned.

When Hugo was first permitted to see the convalescent, her sobs would have melted the heart of a stone. She sat in the great wicker chair by the window, near the flower-stand with the India-rubber plant and the globe of gold-fish, her head resting on the pillows, whose white covering made the dreadful pallor of her face appear yellow and waxen; the frail hands folded on the shawl which her mother had spread over her. Her agony was almost unbearable when she saw Hugo. She had so much, so much to say to him, and here was the opportunity, for Mrs. Breuer had discreetly withdrawn from the room.

But when Hugo took her thin, cold hand in



his, she could not utter a word. She was incapable of making him understand by so much as a silent gesture, or by the withdrawal of her hand, what was going on in her mind. And her anger at her complete helplessness and impotence found vent in bitter tears, in a convulsive trembling and sobbing.

“Come, compose yourself! You are so much better, and you will soon be all right again.” Hugo sought to comfort her, but his soothing words failed to carry conviction. He was aghast at Martha’s looks. He felt the deepest compassion for the unhappy child. And when he saw her tears flow, and the frail body shaken with sobs, he was really touched; he bit his lips to master his emotion. He suffered unspeakably under the lie which still cemented the relations between Martha and him. Dared he tell the poor child the truth—the truth that he had made a terrible mistake when he had believed that he loved her; that he shuddered at the thought of binding himself to her for life; that he loved another—Leonie—to whom his whole heart was given, without whom he could neither work nor live? Dared he tell her the truth?

Impossible! It would have been too cruel. As he looked at the frail, sobbing girl whom a



rough wind would blow away, he knew he must choose between the saving lie and the deadly truth, and he chose the lie.

"Come, cheer up, my poor Martha," he repeated many times, stroking the thin hand. "Everything will be soon all right again." Martha shook her head. "Yes, it will, surely. You must only be reasonable, and not excite yourself so. You must get well, above everything. You have nothing else to do but that. But it is occupation enough, and a serious one, too! You must not give way so, dear Martha; you must fight against your physical weakness with all your mental strength. Do not cry any more."

Martha dried her tears. Her heart was so full that she must unburden it to Hugo. She struggled for words, but none came. At last she managed to bring out the words:

"I saw you—that day—when you went to her."

Hugo understood in a moment what she meant. But he pretended ignorance, and in order to gain time he said:

"What do you mean? You saw me that day? What day?"

"Before I became so ill—the day after we went to the Reichshalle. I saw you there—in the Victoria Strasse."



"Yes? Well, and then?"

"Then," Martha repeated, entirely taken aback by Hugo's self-possession, "I saw you enter her house."

"That is quite natural if you were in the Victoria Strasse at that hour. I had made an appointment with Mrs. Welsheim, and was on hand punctually.

"But you told me that you were going to meet a friend."

"It is true I did tell you that, but because I wished to spare you any unnecessary agitation. Now I have no further reason for keeping the truth from you. I went to Mrs. Welsheim in order to convince myself as to what your relations were likely to be, and to act accordingly. I came away with the conviction that no friendly relations could exist between you two, and I have also given Mrs. Welsheim to understand that we should not make her the call we owed her, and she understood me perfectly. I have resolved on my course. As it would be very ungrateful to suddenly leave off going to a house in which I have received nothing but kindness, I have decided to gradually break off all intercourse with the Welsheims until the intimacy ceases of itself. Now you know all; but you must trust me, and not torment us both with



foolish whims. We'll not speak of the matter again. It is the most sensible plan."

It all sounded so sincere, so simple and reasonable, that Martha was ashamed of having fostered such unworthy suspicions of him. The eloquent words which had come so freely in her solitary hours now forsook her. She could think of no answer, and instead pressed Hugo's hand gratefully in her feeble fingers. She made no further mention of Leonie, although the name burned upon her lips. She suspected how matters stood between the two. With marvellous intuition she could almost fix the hours at which they saw each other. But she kept silent. She calmed herself with the agreeable self-illusion that nothing wrong could take place between them. And she gradually quieted herself in reality with that thought. Thus she finally grew accustomed to Hugo's absences, which had been so dreadful to her at first, and, when he returned, did not even ask him where he had been. Hugo showed himself grateful for this forbearance by redoubled kindness.

What could she say to him indeed? Even if she had the power to disclose her inmost thoughts to him, what would be the inevitable conjecture? That she would be compelled to turn from her faithless lover in abhorrence. And the upshot?



That she would lose him for ever. She shuddered even at the idea of this possibility. Strength and courage failed her as well. Anything but that! Rather the slow torment, rather the degrading submission. Anything but a separation.

She told herself that she was a fool who, in self-torment, magnified harmless trifles into guilty actions. If that beautiful woman were anything to him, it was surely nothing but a passing fancy. His heart, that she knew, belonged to her, his affianced wife. If it did not, why should he have asked her to marry him? She had laid no trap for him. He had come to her of his own free will, because he loved her and had perceived the love of which she was not conscious. He would return to her, even if this woman's fatal charm had infatuated him. For he knew very well that no one in all the world could love him with such a deep, passionate, unselfish love as she, his Martha.

. . . . .

Summer had come. Berlin was hot and disagreeable; the Thiergarten was deserted. Since her marriage, Leonie had been accustomed to meet her parents every midsummer at Ostend or Schweiningen. Welsheim was therefore somewhat astonished when his wife informed him one day that she found the fashionable baths very tire-



some, that they were simply a continuation in another form of the feverish city, and that it would be much more agreeable to her if she could spend the hot days in the vicinity of Berlin in quiet seclusion—perhaps on one of the beautiful Havel lakes. She felt that it would do her good. She had written to her parents in the same strain, appointing her visit for a later date.

Welsheim had found a pretty villa on the Wann See.

What could have induced Leonie to make this strange resolve? She had always enjoyed herself exceedingly at Ostend. It was certainly not easy for her to renounce the pleasure of having her gowns admired at the baths. But Hugo had repeatedly told her, and in the most emphatic terms, that he would not accompany her to Ostend, and that he would not leave Berlin. Leonie had understood perfectly well that it was only because he *could* not go with her. Money troubles were only words to her, but she divined that Hugo could not afford a trip to Ostend. She could not think of leaving her lover for so long a time. Therefore her sudden enthusiasm for the picturesque suburbs of Berlin.

Moreover, the idyllic quiet of the Wann See agreed with her. Hugo visited her three or four



times a week, and these were perhaps the happiest hours of their lives, as they sat alone together upon the broad veranda, the unruffled surface of the lake at their feet, and the dark, fir-clad hills on the opposite shores rising before them; or as they wandered through the forest, talking lightly, or deep in earnest discussion. Towards six o'clock Welsheim returned from the city, laden with bundles. He thanked Hugo, with a hearty shake of the hand, for shortening the long hours for Leonie, and objected when Hugo refused to wait for the last train back to Berlin.

It seemed to them in their happiness that these days must go on for ever. But the summer was over before they knew it. The evenings were already cold and disagreeable, and all the flowers in the small garden before the house had faded, except the brilliant but stiff and awkward dahlias. The time for the first performance of "Hercules and Omphale" approached. In the last week of August the Welsheims returned to the Victoria Strasse.

The parting from the peaceful little house on the Wann See was really very hard for Leonie. She had never been happier. She told herself with incredulous surprise that she was really better than she had ever believed herself capable of being.



Her love for Hugo had worked an ennobling change, and it was a constant source of joy to her. She had never considered herself capable of such sincerity and strength of feeling. She was not half as frivolous as stupid people believed and as she had persuaded herself. Did she not cling to him with all the strength of her being, to him alone? Had she one thought that did not belong to him?

When she asked herself these questions, and felt that she could answer them in a way that made her calm, happy, and content, she quite forgot that as yet her constancy had not been tried.



## CHAPTER VI.

AT last the great day of the first performance arrived. It was the last Tuesday in September. Leonie had already sent out cards announcing that she would be at home on that evening and every following Tuesday. She had made special efforts to have her first evening at home a brilliant one, particularly in honour of Hugo's play, the success of which she did not for a moment doubt. The floral decorations were to be of surpassing beauty. She had invited some notable people for that evening: the artists who were to take the leading parts in Hall's play—a celebrated pianist from London, who chanced to be stopping in Berlin, and the tenor Ernst Vallini, who had made a great sensation the last season at the Opera House, and had been engaged for the Royal Opera at a fabulous salary. The Englishman and the German tenor with the Italian name could not refuse Leonie's request, and had promised to be present at her house that evening.



She had done all this in secret. It was to be a surprise for every one, but especially for Hugo. She had devised numerous other little attentions for him. The buffet was arranged about a bronze group representing Hercules spinning at the feet of Omphale. The bronze was to be Welsheim's first gift to his friend. The play-bill, printed upon satin, was to be inserted into the great pastry. It goes without saying that the huge laurel wreath, with the name of the play and the date of the first performance embroidered upon the ribbons, was not lacking.

The keen pleasure she took in these preparations subdued the great excitement under which she had been labouring these last days, and which might have become serious had her mind not been taken up with other affairs. She was much more excited than Hugo, who was worn out with the fatiguing and exhausting work at the rehearsals, and had come to regard the great event with a certain apathetic calm.

About two o'clock that afternoon Hugo came to her. In order to gain a little rest, she had lain down upon the couch in the bow-window room. She received him without rising. Hugo kissed the hand held out to him, and drawing up an ottoman he seated himself close by the couch.



"I do not need to rise?" she asked smilingly. "I must economise my strength to-day. I shall need it all later. But why do you look so gloomy?" she added in a changed voice. "You should be perfectly happy to-day of all days. Don't worry. Everything will turn out well. Of that I am perfectly confident."

"I am thinking less of the play and its fate than—" He paused for an instant. Leonie raised herself a little, looked him straight in the eyes, and asked, suddenly growing grave:

"Of what are you thinking, then; of what else could you be thinking to-day?"

"I will tell you frankly. You will readily understand me. I am in a dilemma. I do not know what to do this evening after the performance."

"Oh, you mean in case the play is not successful? It would not be pleasant for you to meet any one. Well, dear heart, that possibility does not come into my calculations at all. You will have success, great success—never fear! And if the impossible should happen—well, then we should just close the doors, put up a red placard and postpone the drawing-room performance on account of the sudden illness of the prima donna. There wouldn't be any fibbing about it, for I should be really ill. But failure is not to be thought of."



"Even if everything should go off as favourably as you hope," Hugo answered hesitatingly, "even then I should still be in an extremely difficult position."

Leonie now raised herself upright and looked at him in amazement.

"I do not understand you, really I do not. What do you mean?"

"What shall I do after the performance?" Hugo cried, starting up with a vehement gesture.

"What shall you do? You are to come to me, of course. That is very simple."

"Not as simple as you think. You know—" He hesitated, and then said softly, in a deeper tone, "I have obligations."

It was the first time that Leonie had perceived any trace of these obligations. She had forgotten, with the lapse of time, that any one but she had any claim on Hugo. Her first impulse was to give violent utterance to her indignation, but she mastered her feelings, and after a long pause said languidly:

"Well?"

"The affair is disagreeable to me in the extreme, but what am I to do? I do not need to tell you where my inclinations would lead me. I had not thought of spending the evening with any



one but you. But—an hour ago—as I was giving Mrs. Breuer the tickets, she said to me as she thanked me: ‘And to-night, after the performance, we want to have a nice little time together and celebrate your success. Martha has been looking forward to it for weeks. She has prepared a little remembrance for you, but I tell you in confidence.’ I was entirely taken aback and could think of no other words than ‘Of course, of course.’ What am I to do? Advise me.”

Leonie let her glance wander restlessly around the room, bent forward a little, and then said in an unusually grave tone:

“Yes, my friend, here I must step aside, much as it pains me to do so. I must confess that I am very, very sorry. I cannot disguise it. All those who are coming to-night after the play expect to find you here. Your absence amounts to the virtual announcement of your engagement, and at the same time you are anxious to conceal it. Of myself and my feelings I will not speak. As I have said, I am heartily sorry.”

Leonie had also risen and rustled by him, the long train of her tea-gown sweeping the carpet.

“You are angry with me?” Hugo asked dejectedly, without having the courage to approach her.



“Not angry. I am only very sad. One should never look forward to anything with too much pleasure. I certainly do not want to annoy you to-day, but you can surely understand that it must grieve and distress me that we cannot enjoy this evening together. Perhaps there is also a little vanity concerned. How shall I look when in reply to my husband's and each individual guest's very natural question, ‘Well, and where is Dr. Hall this evening?’ I shall be forced to answer, ‘The doctor has accepted another invitation.’ It will be exceedingly awkward, and there is no doubt but what people will imagine Heaven knows what violent scenes to have passed between us.”

“I have said the same thing to myself. I hardly dare repeat to you the mad expedients that have flashed through my brain in order to free myself from this odious situation. I would not shrink from the most extreme measures—not even from breaking off my engagement—”

Leonie looked at him sharply.

“But it is impossible,” he continued—“impossible, with such brutal suddenness. Martha is a poor, frail girl. The blow would crush her. And if for a long time she has not been to me what she should have been—for I love you only, Leonie, you alone—yet I still have a strong enough feel-



ing of true friendship and humanity for the poor child, who has never given me a moment's pain, to shrink from causing her death. That is not an exaggeration. It is the bitter truth. How should I feel if, when at your side and taking part in your brilliant festivities, I should be conscious that at the same time that poor child was struggling with death, and that I was the cause of it? I have never thought of Martha when I have been with you. To-night the thought of her would force itself between you and me, destroying all our pleasure."

"My dear Hugo, we might talk an hour without advancing a step. We must yield to the inevitable. Perhaps we can still devise some means of giving the unfortunate affair at least a plausible appearance to our guests."

"If I should come later?"

"How long, in all probability, would you have to remain there?"

"Oh, I can easily find an excuse for cutting my stay short—Martha's health. I can say I have made an appointment with the actors for a later hour. That will sound plausible enough. I can surely get away by midnight."

"Well, then, write me a few lines. Plead nervousness. You are too agitated to meet any one



immediately after the performance. You must rest a bit—be alone an hour or so. You are coming later ! I proceed to make a little fun of you. You are a genius in whom one must pardon anything and everything. And when you really do make your appearance—about midnight—people will find everything perfectly natural.”

“Yes, that will be all right !” Hugo exclaimed ; “it is such a relief ! I had thought of the same thing, but I feared that you would be too angry to understand my position, and your anger would be perfectly justifiable. I did not have the courage to propose this plan to you. I thank you, Leonie, with all my heart. You truly love me. I have never doubted it, but I thank you for this new proof of your love.”

He went towards Leonie, who was slowly tearing off the petals of a *gloire de Dijon* rose, and bent his head to kiss her. She offered him her forehead, but he felt that she drew back involuntarily as soon as his lips brushed her face.

“You are right in not doubting my love,” she said. Her voice had a different tone. “And now I must send you away—Felix may come at any moment—I do not care to discuss this disagreeable subject again before him— Then I shall see you



this evening—at the theatre—and I may expect you here about midnight?”

“Good-bye, Leonie. And now, before I go, let me tell you once more how much I thank you, how much I love you. Whatever the result of the play may be, I owe everything to you.”

He drew her to him and kissed her passionately.

“I have nothing to say to you. You know how I feel! Go, dearest—we shall see each other—during the fight—and after the victory.”

When Hugo had left her she sat down in the bow window and stared at the rainy skies. She was very grave, but her face was stern rather than sad. Her meditations could be summed up in these words: “Things cannot go on like this any longer. I will not endure a rival.”

She felt a genuine pleasure to-day when she heard Welsheim’s voice in the adjoining room. He was giving a servant some further directions for the evening. She went to the door of the great drawing-room and called him. Felix hastened to her and kissed her on the forehead—as it chanced, upon the same spot which Hugo’s lips had touched a quarter of an hour before. But this time she did not draw back.

“Can you spare me ten minutes?” she said.



"How can you ask such a thing? I am always at your service."

"Well, come and sit down here beside me. I have something serious I want to talk over with you—about your friend, Dr. Hall. You know that I like him very much, and I am uneasy about him."

"How is that?"

"He has just gone. He came to make his excuses for this evening."

"What! The doctor is not coming? That is simply impossible. And our guests? And the bronze group I sent for?"

"I have arranged that he is to come at a later hour, and have invented a plausible excuse for his delay—but enough of that—it is something else that disturbs me. He wasn't coming because the girl in the Brüder Strasse—you know, his *fiancée*—"

"Miss Breuer?"

"Because Miss Breuer expects him to stay with her this evening. Of course, he would much rather come to us. He takes this engagement very seriously, although I am positive that he does not and cannot love the girl. He thinks he is bound by a hasty promise. I think something should be done."

"You are perfectly right."



"You have seen the girl, feeble, sickly, insignificant—and then, too, the surroundings, the poverty and want. The doctor would simply be ruined. A marriage with that unfortunate person would be nothing less than the death-blow to his future."

"Yes, yes. I fear that too."

"And should his best friends look on without raising a hand?"

"No; but what is to be done? Shall I speak seriously to the doctor? I flatter myself that I have some influence with him."

"I do not undervalue your influence, but I fear that it will be very difficult to find an opportunity of approaching the doctor. I have thought it over carefully, and I have another idea. The girl is undoubtedly consumptive; the transparent skin, the waxen colouring, the red spots upon the cheeks, the unnatural brilliancy of the eyes—there isn't a doubt of it. It is sad, but true nevertheless. The poor child must be sent south, to a milder climate. It is evident that the mother only lacks the money. That money you must place at her disposal, under any pretext, as long as it is a plausible one. We shall not go hungry if we have a few thousand marks or so less, and to these people it is a fortune. When the widow is once settled with her daughter



at Meran, Montreux, or San Remo, then you have the game in your own hands. Then the doctor may listen to a word of reason. Then will be the time to bring your influence to bear upon him. But it would be the most honourable thing to speak seriously with the mother first. If she loves her child she will take the initiative herself."

"Yes, yes, I understand perfectly. Of course, I am ready to place the money at the mother's disposal, so that she may remain in the south with her daughter half a year, or a whole year, as far as I am concerned. The only thing that worries me is how I am to offer it to her."

"A mother will overlook anything if she can help her child. After all, it is not necessary for you to pose as the benefactor. You might arrange it through a third person, the family physician, or—some one. You are so clever! Now that you are convinced that something must be done for the doctor, you will find the right way. Anything you may do will suit me."

"Yes, yes," Welsheim said, thoughtfully stroking his chin. "We will soon arrange that. I am getting the matter straight in my head. And I tell you we must lose no time. Such matters must not be given a back seat. I am sorry that I can't see to it at once; but of course it will not do to-



day! Well, there is still to-morrow. I will look up the widow and tell her. Leave the matter to me. To change the subject. The feeling in favour of Hall's play was very strong on 'change to-day, and I may say I have done my share. Nothing else was spoken of. Nothing else—that is a little too strong! Our first evening will make a furore, I tell you! Twenty people have asked me, 'Is it really true that Vallini is to be at your house to-night, and is to sing?' It will be a great thing, I promise you! It seems that Vallini has never sung before at any private house. In the spring he flatly refused to sing at the privy councillor Genthiner's, who offered him a pile of money. He will not back out at the last moment!"

"You need not fear! But that reminds me that I have a great many things still to attend to for the evening."

"Of course, of course. So have I. I saw the decorations when I stopped at the florist's a few moments ago. They are beautiful! He is coming, with two men, punctually at seven. The caterer has also promised. Well, everything will be all right. I really wanted—it was an idea of mine—to have the ices served in the shape of Hercules and Omphale."

"Good heavens!" Leonie cried, in horror.



"It wouldn't do. I had to give it up. The caterer thought they would be monstrosities; in a word, it wouldn't do. I decided on the traditional swan for Vallini's table—an allusion to Lohengrin, you understand. The caterer offered me a Minerva with the owl, symbol of poetry, he said, for Hall's table, but I objected to it; it was too complicated for me."

"You did quite right. We dine at half past five to-night."

"Very well."

"Order the carriage for a quarter of seven."

"I have already done so. I will not keep you any longer now; you must have enough to do. You are really a genius as a hostess. And your gown?"

"Do not fear. I shall not disgrace you."

"I know, I know! If I were only as sure of everything! Well, until half past five; I will be ready before that. You will not have to wait for me."

He kissed his wife and withdrew hurriedly, as was his wont.

Leonie conferred for the last time with the cook and the butler. The piano-tuner, who was at work on the Steinway in the great drawing-room, drove her away from the front of the house,



and she fled to her dressing-room, where Germaine was busied in laying out the gown which had come from Worth's only that morning. The maid had that peculiar adoring smile on her face which was reserved for her mistress and her mistress's gowns only.



## CHAPTER VII.

It was perfect weather for a first night. The evening was very cool, almost cold. It had rained heavily during the day. For an hour or so the rain had ceased, but, the heavens were still dark.

In the brightly lighted theatre it was cosy and warm. By a quarter of seven the parquet and boxes began to fill. The box office had not been opened at all, and the speculators who had been doing a rushing business had become invisible even before seven.

All glasses were turned upon Leonie, who appeared in her box with exceptional punctuality. She did not seem to notice the general attention she attracted. She was perfectly unaffected, and graciously welcomed the two gentlemen she had invited to her box—Dr. Ringstetter and Mr. von Janow, a young sportsman and general favourite in Berlin society. She looked charming. Welsheim felt highly flattered as he noticed the sensation made by his beautiful wife.



The excitement which had again mastered Leonie sent a brilliant colour to her cheeks. Slowly fanning herself, she exchanged a few indifferent remarks with the gentlemen back of her—in order to show herself in profile—then she raised her opera glass to her eyes, nodded to her acquaintances, and smiled with marked affability as she answered the strikingly profound bow of a gentleman who sat in the box directly opposite. This gentleman shared with Leonie the honour of attracting the attention of the audience, particularly the feminine portion. Everything about the man was as extraordinary as his bow—his face, his figure, his apparel, his manner, his gestures. His face was not remarkable, but might be called handsome; at least the women found it so. The features were regular, the eyes large and bright, the colouring healthy. The thick, brown hair was carefully arranged and curled. A bold twist that had been given to the heavy, fair mustache, turned up impudently at the corners of the mouth, leaving the upper lip perfectly bare. The man smiled a great deal, perhaps a little too amiably, showing two rows of magnificent white teeth as he did so. The rounded cheeks gave the face something of a feminine appearance. The shirt, which was cut low so as to leave the unusually powerful throat



bare, was fastened in front with three large, flashing diamonds. The broad cravat was loosely tied with scrupulous negligence. His dress coat was of the latest fashion's most extravagant cut. He moved about a great deal, talking vivaciously. Any one who regarded him closely could see that he felt himself to be the centre of observation. His deep bow to Leonie was noticed by the entire parquet.

"These artists do everything differently from ordinary mortals," Leonie said, turning around again. "Did you notice how Vallini bowed to me?"

"Did I notice it?" Ringstetter answered; "he bows just like—a masculine prima donna."

"You must not make any wicked remarks about him at present. You know that you are to meet him to-night at my house. I have to treat him well."

"To-night? Then we shall have more to say about him to-morrow. Vallini is accustomed to good treatment."

"So I have heard," Leonie replied. "He is said to turn all the women's heads. That is sufficient to prevent me from having any fear of meeting him."

"Well, he is supposed to be something of a



Pied Piper, or a Postillion of Longjumeau," Von Janow threw in. "Have you heard him sing?"

"Naturally. And he has charmed me as he has every one. He has a wonderful voice; I have never heard a better Maurice. The artist carried me away, but the man does not interest me. But I forget. I may not say that yet! I cannot endure handsome men."

"Indeed?" Ringstetter asked, with a malicious smile.

"You mean to make fun of me on account of my friendship for Dr. Hall? Do you know, I do not think the doctor at all handsome? He looks intelligent, interesting, but not, according to my taste, handsome. Vallini is handsome, and that is why he does not please me, as enthusiastic as I am about his voice and his singing."

"That is really so," Welsheim affirmed. "My wife is really queer in that respect. I ought to know her if any one does. She cares absolutely nothing for handsome men."

"You undervalue yourself," answered Ringstetter, and, turning to Leonie, he added, "For a lady for whom Vallini has no charms, you have been coquetting with him pretty violently!"

In fact, the two had been smiling at each other very meaningly.



"He is to sing for us to-night, you know," Leonie retorted. "In such case, one must make special efforts. What are we waiting for? It must be long past seven."

"You see the audience has not settled down yet. People had to come in carriages, on account of the bad weather, and that always causes a delay. Besides, the fifteen minutes of grace are not yet up," Ringstetter said, after giving a glance at his watch.

By no person in the house was Leonie observed with closer attention than by Martha Breuer, who sat with her mother in the parquet, at the left of the entrance, on the side of the house opposite the Welsheims' box, and directly beneath Vallini. She was prepared for meeting Leonie again to-night, and had been continually on the lookout for her. As she saw Leonie enter the box, her breath stopped short, she grew pale, and pressed her lips tightly together to suppress the sigh that struggled through them. Her large eyes grew unnaturally brilliant, and she felt the same frightful chill in the left side and the same piercing pain as before. The sight of Leonie was torturing to her, but she could not look away. She envied the woman above her—her beauty, her vivacity, her superb toilet, her unaffected self-possession. She was enraged that this Leonie could chatter and laugh,



nodding and looking about her, as she was now doing. She did not stop to think how much more enraged she would have been had she noticed any sign of excitement in Leonie's manner.

In truth, Leonie was much more excited than Martha. Martha did not take into account the importance of this evening to Hugo, while Leonie knew exactly what depended upon it.

The bell back of the stage struck. The muffled murmur subsided at once. Perfect silence followed. A second stroke of the bell, and the curtain was drawn up with a rustle.

Leonie was in a fever during the first scene, to which the audience listened attentively, but without visible signs of approval. She was inwardly enraged at this cold indifference, at this want of appreciation. It appeared incomprehensible to her that some of the most charming touches in the dialogue, which she had felt most sure of, scarcely called forth a smile of approbation.

Suddenly she realised the possibility of failure, and in her overexcited brain she saw that frightful phantom in horrible distinctness, saw the malicious and derisive faces about her, heard the sharp hisses of ridicule and scorn.

Her blood grew cold, her lips trembled. She seemed to be far away. Something came between



her and the stage, like a thick veil, cutting it from view. She scarcely knew what was going on before her, although she knew the play by heart. With no other purpose than to hide her consternation and to give herself a mental support, she raised her operaglass to her eyes and looked straight before her. She stared into vacancy, seeing nothing. But suddenly her attention was arrested. She now became conscious that she had been staring steadfastly for some time at the person opposite to her.

Vallini felt flattered. He smiled caressingly, closed his eyes several times slowly and significantly, and stroked his heavy mustache in a way that had some similarity to a stealthy kiss of the hand. And when he noticed that Leonie still kept her glance fixed on him, he grew bolder and raised his own glass. Just at this moment Leonie started from her trance. She suddenly saw close before her two large circular disks which reflected the subdued light of the great chandelier; saw the gleaming teeth behind the half-opened lips—parted in a peculiar smile. She was startled, and quickly lowered her glasses.

Ah, this Vallini had chosen a good moment in which to cast amorous looks at her! He ought to be listening; he ought to give himself up to the



influence of Hugo's creation instead of gaping at her in that self-satisfied way, and casting sheep's eyes at her.

And these were the people for whom poor Hugo had to write! These were his judges! This confident coxcomb, who, fancying himself irresistible, had presumed to think that she would give him any special marks of favour, suddenly became intolerable to her.

Martha had gradually forgotten all about Leonie. The play entirely engrossed her attention. She gave no thought to her surroundings, and could not have told whether the audience was cold or sympathetic. She was astonished at the cleverness of the dialogue, and was proud to think that it was Hugo's work.

Towards the close of the first act the audience had warmed up considerably, and when the curtain fell the applause was loud and hearty. The actors were twice called before the curtain. Martha had not expected anything else, and joyously applauded with the rest. Leonie was quite taken aback by the unexpected change. She breathed freely once more, and gave an embarrassed smile to think that she could have made such a mistake.

There was only a short interval between the



first and second acts. The audience remained seated, but the conversation was so lively and noisy that those versed in the ways of the theatre already ventured to predict a gratifying success.

The only one who left his seat was Vallini. Almost immediately after there was a knock at the Welsheims' box.

The handsome tenor entered, smiling as ever, bowed to the men, and kissed Leonie's hand.

"I only wished to inquire after the health of my gracious patroness; and may I ask how you are enjoying yourself?"

Leonie, to whom at this moment any conversation was obnoxious, was vexed at Vallini's visit, and answered only with a smile.

"Yes, just so," Vallini proceeded, as though Leonie had made some reply to his question. "It seems to be taking. I have found it very nice—until now, at least."

Leonie looked at the tenor in perfect amazement. This man found Hugo's intellectual creation "very nice." The words struck her like an actual injury. Vallini caught her strange look, but he misinterpreted it, and said disparagingly, "I say, *until now*. We shall see how it turns out later on. The play seems a little too sober, to me.



There is not enough to laugh at; and when I go to the theatre I want to laugh."

He seemed to pride himself on this sentence, for he smiled and showed his teeth, and looked at the four occupants of the box, one after another, as though he had uttered a weighty remark, and expected them to agree with him.

"I saw a play in Munich a short time ago," he went on, and then, breaking off the sentence he had begun, he remarked to Leonie: "No doubt you have read that I was in Munich? All the papers were full of it. What a success I had there—it was simply stupendous! Even royalty had the graciousness to treat me with marked favour. I had the honour of singing three times before his Majesty—twice at Schloss-Berg, once in Hohenschwangau. Each time I was sent for in the royal carriage. My colleagues, who had always treated me charmingly, were simply beside themselves! On the day of my departure his Majesty sent me, by the court marshal personally, a magnificent watch, with the royal cipher in brilliants, and accompanied with the most flattering words of recognition. Ah! to be sure—I can show it to you. I happen to have it with me." He drew out a very valuable watch, which he loosened from its chain with a dexterity plainly acquired by



frequent practice, and handed it over to Leonie with the words, "It strikes the hours, the quarter hours, and the minutes."

Leonie took the proffered watch with a pre-occupied smile. The man beside her was simply odious to her. She was to trouble herself with his diamond-set repeater—now, when Hugo was standing behind the scenes in a fever of excitement, when the decisive battle was being fought.

"Really very beautiful," she contented herself with saying, for the sake of making some remark. And after she had held the watch in her hand just long enough not to appear discourteous, she gave it back to the fortunate possessor with the words, "It is very beautiful."

"Pray, my dear sirs, there is no harm in handling it," Vallini said, and passed the precious object over to the three gentlemen for their inspection. Turning to Leonie, he went on: "I shall be very much interested in meeting the author at your house to-night. These authors have an easy time of it! They write when they please, what they please, as they please—in a dressing-gown, if it suits them. We of my profession have to bring our whole personality to bear upon our work. We are dependent upon all manner of things—on our fellow-artists, on the orchestra, the acoustics of



the hall, and on the weather! In Dresden, where I sang a short time ago with immense success—you have probably read of it in the newspapers?—there has not been such a success there in years, the worthy Saxons simply went crazy. What was I going to say? Ah, yes. In Dresden I had to give up my last performance because I had taken cold—just a simple cold. A cold is a trifle to an ordinary person—an author or an artist, for instance. He stays at home, drinks chamomile tea, and the matter is settled. For us it is a loss of so and so much; and, apart from this consideration—Heaven knows I am not conceited, but yet it is annoying to have to renounce all the ovations that had been prepared for me—on account of a stupid cold! It was to have been a grand night. More than a dozen laurel wreaths were sent to me at the hotel, notwithstanding, ribbons and all. They were simply magnificent. But still it is not the same thing, is it? And the entire court had announced its intention of being present. You can imagine what an unfortunate thing it was for me! His Majesty graciously remarked, when the change of performance was announced: ‘It is too bad! I had looked forward to the evening.’ His Majesty had looked forward to the evening! And all on account of a miserable cold!”



The lights were turned down, and the stroke of the bell proclaimed the beginning of the second act.

"Excuse me," Vallini broke off, "I do not wish to disturb my neighbours. We shall see each other again."

He withdrew with a deep bow.

Leonie gave a sigh of relief as he left and closed the door behind him.

Ringstetter and Janow smiled thoughtfully, and exchanged expressive looks. Welsheim remarked leniently, "He has such a magnificent voice, and is to sing at our house to-night."

During the second act the success of the play was assured. The well-conceived plot held the attention, and the effective closing scene produced a strong impression, which was made evident by a burst of stormy applause at the fall of the curtain.

After repeated calls of the actors, the demands for the author became uproarious. Hall needed pressing, but his opposition was soon overcome, and as he appeared behind the footlights, led by the actress to whom he owed much of the success of his play, he was greeted by the shouts of the entire audience.

Martha was in a state of perfect bliss. Not until now, when she saw her lover on the boards, honoured as the hero of the day, did she grasp



somewhat the full meaning of this hour, and a thrill of happiness passed over her. Her great eyes sparkled more than ever, and the flush on her cheeks deepened. But her happiness was only of a moment's duration. Hugo knew perfectly well where she sat. She thirsted for the look that would prove that his love belonged to her. But she was crushed by bitter disappointment when she saw Hugo, who made a strangely poor figure on the stage, and bowed with unusual awkwardness, cast a rapid glance towards the opposite side of the house, and look up with a peculiar expression towards the first row of boxes—there, where Leonie sat. Martha saw, too, how the brilliant woman caught the look, and answered it with a slow, languid lowering of the lids, and a scarcely perceptible inclination of the head. Martha was very wretched, and her hand went mechanically to her side. Again she felt that horrible coldness which was so hard to bear.

The spectators rose noiselessly to mingle in the narrow corridors, to express their opinions on the play, to parade their wisdom, to learn the latest *bonmot* of the cleverest wit and to carry it farther. The general opinion was highly in favour of the piece and its author. Even the critics seemed to be satisfied. They maintained



an encouraging silence. The only unfavourable comments came from a few unsuccessful brother playwrights, and those managers who did not have the play in charge.

While Martha sat there with bowed head, and stared at the empty seats before her, Leonie was holding court in her box. She was radiant with pleasure, and received the homage of the numberless callers as a matter of course. They congratulated her on the success of the play as though it were her own work. She had entirely recovered her self-possession, and was no longer angry at Vallini, who appeared in the box for a couple of minutes to announce that the piece was to be played in magnificent style in Hamburg. He had recently seen an actress there who was cut out for the part of the heroine.

"Hamburg of all places!" he continued. "That is the city for theatres. You have probably read in the papers how they *fêted* me there. It was simply stupendous! I have signed a contract for next year—but under very different terms," he added, smiling. "I see no reason why we should sing money into the managers' pockets alone. We artists devote everything to our work—our whole souls, our heart's blood. Am I not right?"



"Of course you are right," answered Ringstetter, with imperturbable gravity. "Heart's blood cannot be paid highly enough. And you forget the divine afflatus—"

"Yes, indeed! Ah, there I see a lady to whom I have long owed a call. You will excuse me?"

With a kiss of the hand and a courteous bow, Vallini took his leave, to make room for the next caller.

"The happy man!" Janow exclaimed as he left.

"There is Mrs. Welsheim," said Mrs. Breuer to her daughter.

"Indeed?" replied Martha, absently and wearily.

"She is making herself rather conspicuous," added the widow.

Martha turned her head slowly towards Leonie's box.

"She seems to be very much pleased at Hugo's success," observed Martha indifferently.

"But the play is really too beautiful, and how different everything seems on the stage! I can hardly wait for the last act. Hugo did not read us that. I was surprised at it, but now I am glad. We have the pleasure still in store for us— But you are so quiet, child. Don't you feel well?"



"Why yes, mamma. But I can only express so badly what I should like to say."

"Don't exert yourself. You must be fresh after the play. Child, I am very happy. This is really the happiest evening I have spent in a long, long time."

"Yes, mamma."

In the mean time the house had gradually filled again. Only a few stragglers pushed through the narrow rows in the parquet. In kindly suspense and expectant silence the audience awaited what was to follow. And the expectation was not disappointed. Until the middle of the act the verdict was decidedly favourable. Then came a discordant scene which seemed to threaten the success of the play. The audience became restless. Throats were cleared and coughs were heard. The invisible bond between the actors on the stage and the people in the house relaxed. It looked critical in the extreme. But a lucky word turned the adverse current into a favourable channel again. And from that moment until the end the interest mounted steadily, and, when the curtain fell for the last time, a perfect storm of applause broke out. Leonie was right; it was a great, a startling success.

Three, four times was Hall forced to show



himself on the stage—at first with the company, finally alone—and each time his appearance was greeted with a salvo of applause. Each time he bowed in a somewhat awkward manner, at first to every one in general, then with a stolen glance towards Leonie's box in particular. Each time Leonie thanked him in the same way—by a slow closing of the eyes, a peculiar smile of the half-opened mouth—and each time the familiar interchange was feverishly observed by Martha.

At the moment that Hall was bowing for the last time, the thought of Martha suddenly came to him. When he lifted his head, he looked in the direction where he knew her to be. He was a second too late. The falling curtain was already so low that he had only time to catch a glimpse of the first two rows in the parquet. Then the grey canvas separated him from the audience who were now crowding the exits.

The author then received the congratulations of the actors, who were delighted over the success of the play. He was embraced, even kissed. He stammered a few words of thanks, pressed the manager's hands heartily a dozen times, brought out his hat, ulster, and umbrella from the cloak-room, and then threaded his way slowly and thoughtfully through the labyrinth of passages



and stairs to the stage exit on the Charlotten Strasse.

The weather had become frightful. It rained in torrents. The gleam of the lamps was reflected in the small puddles which had formed between the stones of the imperfect pavement, and in which the falling drops made small concentric rings. It had also grown cold. Hugo hardly noticed it. His heart was filled with warm sunshine. The damp, musty smell of the cab which the porter had summoned did not trouble him. His thoughts were far away, and he jumped up in astonishment when the driver pulled up before the house on the Brüder Strasse.

As he mounted the stairs again very slowly, a feeling of regret came over him that he could not go immediately to Leonie; but he had a genuine pity for poor Martha, and it was a certain consolation that he was now, as he told himself, making a sacrifice for her. If there were only some means of telling her the brutal truth: that, although honouring her good qualities, he could not love her, but that his heart was given to another! This duplicity had become unbearable. He must make an end of it. If he only knew how he could confess his error, how he could atone for it without letting the poor girl suffer too cruelly for his fault!



He put the key in the lock reluctantly. His face was very grave. Then he gave himself a shake, straightened himself up, passed his hand over his eyes as if he were trying to thrust away an unpleasant sight, and entered. At the same time the door of the sitting-room opened. Martha appeared on the threshold, Mrs. Breuer behind her. The poor girl could not speak a word; she flung her arms around Hugo's neck and sobbed as though lamenting over some misfortune. Hugo was touched, and with him also tears were nearer than laughter.

Slowly and kindly he drew himself from Martha's embrace to advance to the widow, who, beaming with joy, was holding out her hand to him. As he was about to raise her hand to his lips, poor Mrs. Breuer was also overcome; she embraced him heartily and kissed him on both cheeks. Martha could not calm herself yet, and the heavy sobs still shook the frail body.

"Is she not a strange child? That is how she shows her gladness!" cried Mrs. Breuer in tender reproach. "Be sensible, child! Let Hugo take you to supper."

Hugo noticed the festal arrangement of the table. It was all as well meant as it was poor. In addition to the oil-lamp, two lighted candles stood



on the table. The cold meat was there in double quantity. At Hugo's place was a pitiful little laurel wreath tied with exquisitely embroidered ribbons. "To my dear Hugo—Martha," on the one end; on the other, "Hercules and Omphale, September 30, 1873," surrounded by oak and laurel wreaths. Near Hugo's plate stood a pint bottle of champagne in a bowl which did duty as a wine-cooler.

Mrs. Breuer rejoiced in secret over Hugo's pleased surprise at the unusual preparations.

She smiled with self-satisfaction as though she would say, "Yes, indeed, we have no need to be ashamed of ourselves."

Hugo was deeply moved and genuinely shamed by Martha's work. He hardly dared express his thanks; he felt himself unworthy of the loving gift. With hearty fervour he kissed the small, slender fingers which had performed the laborious task with so much skill.

"So you are satisfied?" he finally began, while the widow tormented herself in trying to unfasten the wire around the cork. "And I should be satisfied, too, should I not? I think it was really a success."

"It was beautiful," answered Martha, who had gradually grown calmer.



"And what impression did you get from the audience?"

"Dear me! I paid little attention to them."

"But you think the play took well?"

"As far as I can judge, yes, but I understand so little how to judge the public rightly. You must know far better yourself."

She said it quite simply and openly. But Hugo was disappointed. He had looked for an enthusiastic assent to his opinion.

"And what do you think?" he asked, turning to the window, who had at last extracted the troublesome cork.

"I think it was a splendid success. It was greatly applauded, was it not? It was certainly a success, and let us drink to it, dear Hugo."

The glasses were not sufficiently cooled, and she could only half fill them, for the foam mounted to the brim. The glasses clinked. Hugo drained his to the dregs, the two women only sipped theirs.

A pause ensued. Hugo was consumed with the desire to hear the particulars of the play and its effect, and the reception it had met with. Martha, also, had a thousand pretty things to say to him, but her clumsiness of expression sealed her lips. She smiled sadly and nodded to him.



"Come, help yourselves," urged the widow, who had refilled Hugo's glass.

"What pleased you the most?" asked Hugo, who had not heard the widow's exhortation.

"The whole play pleased me," answered Martha.

"Well, yes," replied Hugo, deeply annoyed by this unresponsiveness. "But everything does not succeed in the same measure. One scene takes a hold on the audience, another appeals far less. What I mean is, what made the strongest impression upon you?"

"I understand," answered Martha, struggling for words, "but I really cannot say. I thought the first act was the best, but then the second pleased me equally well, and the third also."

"And the other people, your neighbours, what did they say?"

"They also thought everything beautiful, I think. But, as I already told you, I paid little attention to others. You must ask a wiser one than I am."

Hugo fought against his growing vexation, and emptied his glass a second time.

"But you are eating nothing at all," urged the widow. "The cold wine on an empty stomach—it cannot agree with you."



"I have no appetite, thank you," answered Hugo.

He looked at the clock. The minutes dragged sluggishly along. He was out of humour, impatient, bored. At this moment he was looked for in the most brilliant drawing-rooms in the city. *There* was combined everything that could give him pleasure. There were clever men who would tell him in keen, fluent words what he longed to hear. There were beautiful women who would spoil him with sweet words of flattery. There was she, Leonie. There he would be surrounded, honoured. There he would be the hero of the hour. And all the clever men, and all the brilliant women, in the splendid surroundings, in the tasteful, luxurious rooms. And here he sat in this poor little room, opposite this plain, elderly woman in a sober dark dress, next to a silent, feeble girl. The two candles sputtered despondently. The small bottle, already nearly emptied, heightened the depressing influence of the scanty table. The richly embroidered ribbons looked at him reproachfully. Was his first triumph to be celebrated like this?

Martha saw that Hugo's thoughts had wandered, that he craved something very different from what she could offer him.



Twice she started to say something that would please him, and that would revive their spirits. But no words passed her lips.

The conversation dragged slowly and painfully along. Hugo scarcely listened to what was being said, and talked without knowing what he was saying. He was preoccupied, absent-minded. Martha knew perfectly well where he was in spirit, and when he looked covertly again at the clock the painful desire seized her to facilitate his going.

"I think it is hardly right that you should spend such an evening quietly at home with us."

"If I may tell you frankly, I have an appointment with the actors—it is customary. But there is no hurry—I explained that I should probably be late; and if it is at all disagreeable to you—"

"I quite understand," interrupted Martha; "do not take us into consideration in the slightest. Besides, I could not remain with you much longer. I am very tired."

She rose, and Hugo followed her example with marked alacrity.

He gratefully kissed her cold forehead, pressed the widow's hand, and was about to take his leave as soon as possible, when he remembered Martha's wreath. He turned, stepped to the table, and took up the loving, well-meant present.



"You had better leave the wreath here," said Martha: "I have still a few little things to do to it."

"What are you thinking of?" cried Hugo, who had suddenly recovered his spirits; "if you think that I will part from my first trophy to-day, you are much mistaken. To-morrow, perhaps, I will intrust it to you if there is really anything more to be done to it. But to-day mine is the wreath, and to me it belongs."

Martha was silent.

"Once more my heartiest thanks, and good night," said Hugo, and hastily left the room.

The widow shook her head when he had closed the door behind him. "Strange," she said slowly; "I had expected a different evening."

Martha was wounded to the quick. She felt deceived and defrauded. If it were really the actors whom he was now going to meet, then she would forgive him everything; but if he were hurrying to that woman, then she must have certain proof.

"Come, go to bed, mamma; your eyes are closing! I will see to everything."

"But you said you felt—"

"I only said so to make it easy for Hugo."

"Yes, yes—Hugo. Child, do you know, if I



may speak plainly to you, there are many things which do not please me."

"It is late, mamma; it is almost eleven! Go to bed! We will talk over all you wish at a more suitable time."

"Well, my child; and you feel really—"

"Perfectly well. Good night, mamma."

"Good night, then, dear heart. Do not stay up too long. I am really ready to fall with weariness. Good night."

The widow, who during these last words had begun to unfasten her dress, withdrew slowly.

Martha blew out the candles, put them in their old places, cleared the table, and then seated herself on the hard sofa, to indulge in melancholy meditation.

She felt the old pain at her heart, and she pressed her hand close to her left side. She heard Hugo, who had donned evening dress, leave his rooms and run down stairs more noisily than was his wont. She also heard the hasty slamming of the front door.



## CHAPTER VIII.

It was still raining. Uncomfortable as the Welsheims' guests must have felt on their way there in the cold, damp rain of the autumn night, the moment they crossed the threshold a sensation of warmth and comfort came over them. The broad street door stood open. The staircase was as light as day. The arrivals were immediately relieved of their wet wraps by attentive servants. In the tastefully arranged dressing-rooms was to be found every requisite for repairing any damage the toilets had suffered.

And the reception-rooms themselves displayed an almost overpowering splendour in honour of the day. The bow-window room was transformed into a veritable flower garden. In the centre of the circular divan rose a mass of white camellias and deep-red roses of wonderful beauty. The entire bow window was changed into a bower of flowering plants of every variety. Climbing vines crept up the sides to the ceiling and wound around the



hanging lamp, which they almost smothered. In the great drawing-room the floral decorations were, if possible, even more profuse and costly. In the four corners stood four huge bronze vases, more than a man's height, of a dark blue tint, around which wound golden, scaly monsters, dragons with gaping jaws, fantastic crocodiles, and fabulous snakes. The gigantic bouquets in these vases produced the finest decorative effect of form and colour. The decoration of the smaller drawing-room adjoining was no less rich and tasteful. The dining-room was closed for the time being.

The guests were enraptured with the beauty and fragrance which enveloped them. They were doubly susceptible to the comfortable warmth, the glittering beauty and brightness, in contrast with the rawness and the gloom of the disagreeable night, and sipped the hot tea that was offered to them immediately on their arrival, with the utmost satisfaction. They were all in gay humour, all were delighted over the brilliant success of the play. Most of them knew Hall personally, the rest looked forward with pleasure to making his acquaintance. Leonie was charmingly captivating in her happiness. She allowed the letter which Hugo had written at her instigation to go the rounds, and jested in the most bewitching manner over



the delightful childishness of the author, who must first withdraw into solitude before he could present himself to even his best friends and sincere admirers. But in an oddity—when speaking to the women, she said, in a genius—we must overlook all little peculiarities.

The greater number of the guests arrived almost simultaneously, after the end of the performance. About half an hour later came some of the actors and actresses who had taken the most important parts, with whom Welsheim, through Hall's instrumentality, was on the friendliest terms. They were showered with compliments. Vallini, who was treated with marked distinction by the hostess and her guests, was of the opinion that they were making altogether too much of the actors. What would be left for those who put their whole soul into song, who gave their heart's blood?

Those who had not had the good fortune to be present at the performance, listened eagerly to the account of the play and its wonderful success. There was scarcely anything else talked about. One opinion alone prevailed—that in Dr. Hugo Hall the German stage had found a writer of unusual gifts, and one who undoubtedly had a great future before him. Vallini considered that there was altogether too much said of the author, and he



had a constant desire to turn the conversation from the evening's success to other successes which he had celebrated while on his starring tour through Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Breslau, etc.

By eleven o'clock all the guests on whom one could count with certainty were assembled. The company, some sixty or seventy in number, was more brilliant and interesting than usual. There were only people there who were distinguished by birth or talent—among them many of the best-known people in the capital.

The moment had arrived when Leonie could bring her irresistible smile to bear upon the pianist whose friendly co-operation she had secured beforehand, and say that it would be charming if they could have a little music, they would all be so delighted to hear the great artist. The pianist did not need to be entreated long. Without further ado he allowed his charming hostess to conduct him to the grand piano. He struck a powerful chord; the conversation ceased. He produced a great effect by his masterly rendering of Listz's "Second Rhapsody."

In Vallini's opinion there was a little too much praise showered on the pianist. With an instrument from which a mere touch elicits harmony, it is no great thing to produce an effect—it is only a



matter of more or less mechanical perfection, something which can finally be attained by any one. How different it is with the artist who has first to find in his own organism the means for producing an artistic impression, who works with his heart's blood, who puts his whole soul into the notes! And in just compensation the effect is quite different from any which a lifeless instrument is capable of producing. He happened to remember the impression he had made a short time before in St. Petersburg, with a simple cantilene of Bellini's. The Grand Duchess Olga, royalty itself, had shed tears! And then the storm of enthusiasm which had followed! But he was speaking of well-known facts; it had appeared in all the papers.

"Now, my highly honoured sir, and gifted of the gods," said Leonie, approaching Vallini, "you must know what I have come to beg for. Be noble! Do not make it too hard for me!" She smiled, as she alone could, bent forward slightly, and held her head a little to one side as she looked up at the handsome tenor, as a child who begs for sugar-plums. It was quite settled that Vallini would sing. He had positively agreed to. He had his music in his overcoat pocket, and had rehearsed that afternoon with the accompanist. But he thought fit to play the innocent.



"I cannot imagine what it is you would ask, fair lady."

"So you will not spare my entreaties. What is the first request that I would make of you as a hostess? You would enchant us if you were to sing us some little thing."

"But, dear madame, you know I never—"

"I know all. But I know above all that you are gallant, and you will not find it in your heart to deny me a request which I make in the name of all the ladies, young and old, who are looking lovingly over here. See! they know quite well what I am asking of you."

"You are irresistible! Well, then, if it must be—"

"It must be."

"But you must be lenient, for I am not in good voice—and what shall I sing?"

"Anything you please."

"Something Italian, I think—the cavatine from 'Il Trovatore,' perhaps."

"Just as you please. If you will sing at all, I shall be infinitely grateful."

"Indeed!" said Vallini, with a half-cynical smile. "Grateful? Beware that I do not remind you of it!"

"I am not afraid. Shall I now see that silence is secured?"



"I happen to have the notes with me. I was studying this afternoon. I will get them."

The accompanist had already been notified, and had seated himself at the piano. He played a soft prelude while Leonie prepared the guests for the event. As Vallini approached the piano, the great drawing-room in which all the guests had gathered was perfectly still.

His singing was marvellous. His voice was strangely melodious, particularly in the higher notes, to which was added the most charming freshness and manly strength. During his song his hearers grew hot and cold by turns. The moment Vallini opened his mouth, an incomprehensible change took place in him. Everything obtrusive and foolish, his childish vanity and conceit—in a word, all that was laughable in the man—was banished as though by magic. He now impressed one only as a true, earnest, sincere artist. He touched, impressed one, he carried one away. He found such melodious, sobbing notes to express his sorrow, the cry of his despair was so intense that those cooler spectators that a few moments before had been biting their lips to keep from laughing when he boasted of his triumphs, and exhibited his trophies in the shape of small orders, medals, jewelled studs, watches, rings, etc., now



listened, shaking their hands incredulously, and found no answer to the question, if this great singer and this little fool could really be one and the same. That that great miracle of art should reveal itself in so funny a mortal seemed to them the greatest of miracles.

The audience was spellbound, and as the last note died away the general delight expressed itself in the most violent fashion. Vallini was surrounded and lauded to the skies, especially by the women, upon whom the singer's personality made an unusual impression. Even among the cleverest there were few who, like Leonie, had discovered his absurdity and foolishness. There was in his face, his figure, his bearing, something inscrutable which men were not aware of, but which the women plainly detected and which charmed them.

Leonie, who gave him the heartiest and warmest thanks for the unequalled musical treat, was the least sincere of them all. She had slipped unperceived into the dining-room immediately after the first notes, to assure herself that everything was in readiness. She had given a few orders, and appeared at the entrance of the great drawing-room just in time to convince herself of Vallini's effect upon her guests. It gave her real regret to have heard as good as nothing of the song, for she



was very susceptible to music, singing in particular.

The whole company was in the highest spirits. It was now almost half past eleven, and Leonie was about to bid her guests to supper, when Hugo appeared. She had no reason for expecting him so soon, but something told her that he was coming, and the instant that Hugo crossed the threshold she had stepped towards the door. She showed her joy so openly, and congratulated him with such heartiness, that all eyes turned towards the two. Every one crowded around the successful author, congratulating him on the great and well-deserved success of his play. Hugo was happy! How he had longed for this! He had already begun to doubt. Now he felt that his success was real. Now he needed to put no questions to elicit the looked-for answer. Each one told him, unasked, how original the subject was, how interesting the action, how keen the portrayal of character, how spirited the dialogue. "Hercules and Omphale" was at last something new; it meant a step forward for the dramatic art in Germany. He heard it a dozen times—he could not hear it often enough.

Vallini was inwardly raging at these enthusiastic demonstrations. He said to himself that every assemblage, this one as well, had only a certain



amount of enthusiasm at its disposal, and whatever was used of this store in another's favour was stolen from him. Moreover, it was his artistic rendering that had put the guests in their joyous humour. He had sown what Dr. Hall now reaped! It was a crying injustice. He was made for something better than to prepare an ovation for dramatic tyros! But it served him quite right! Why had he allowed himself to be persuaded to give something of his best—his heart's blood, his soul—to these people? Why had he accepted the invitation at all?

Why? Vallini smiled as he asked this question in his silent monologue, and answered it with unblushing candour. He intended to be paid a high price—nothing less than Leonie's highest favour. This brilliant woman with the magnificent dark hair and the restless glances of the keen blue eyes pleased him. He knew, as all the world did, that she was on the most intimate terms with Dr. Hall, and he had no faith in women who in their married life diverged a first step but never a second from the straight and narrow path. He had come to this house with the avowed intention of turning the fair Leonie's head. He did not for one moment doubt his final success. His colleague, Orpheus, had tamed wilder creatures through the power of music.



He was still smiling when Leonie approached him, closely followed by Hugo. "I wish to make you two gentlemen acquainted: our dear friend, Dr. Hall—our great singer, Signor Vallini." Vallini smiled more graciously, and more sure of victory than ever, as he bowed to Hall. The thought flashed through his brain, "I will prepare some unpleasantness for this gentleman later." And, as though Hugo had divined these unspoken words, he felt something like a challenge in Vallini's perfectly correct bow, and answered with as measured reserve as politeness allowed. Without any perceptible cause, he saw in this Vallini something hostile and disturbing. And, strange! Leonie also plainly felt that these two men, who behaved towards each other with perfect good breeding, and betrayed their inward feelings by no outward sign, were as powerfully divided as the poles. She felt that a heated discussion was threatening, and that it was her duty to smother the invisible flame.

"You have missed a great deal," she said, turning to Hugo. "Signor Vallini has enraptured us all by his magical voice and masterly execution. A more glorious celebration of your success could hardly be imagined."

"Pray don't mention it," answered Vallini. "If I have given you any pleasure I am sufficiently re-



warded." He emphasized the "you" strongly, and accompanied it with a tender look. "If you will be very indulgent, however, will you give me the the honour of taking you in to supper?"

Leonie glanced at Hugo in embarrassment.

"You have, unfortunately, come too late," Hugo now said. "Mrs. Welsheim has been kind enough to confer that honour upon me."

The two men again made a scarcely perceptible bow to each other. Hugo carried off Leonie, while Vallini turned to a very pretty woman who stood near him, and who had been burning to express her admiration to the great singer.

"You should have said some friendly word to Vallini," whispered Leonie to her lover.

"The man is exceedingly disagreeable to me."

"Why?"

"I don't know, but he is simply repugnant to me."

"And I have only asked him to add to your evening—for it is your evening, my dearest."

"I know it, and I thank you."

He pressed her arm tenderly as he led her through the small drawing-room to the dining-room, the wide sliding doors of which had just been opened.

The decorations drew forth exclamations of



heartly admiration. The buffet, in the centre of which on a flower-covered pedestal rose the bronze group of the ravishing Omphale and Hercules kneeling at her feet, was really magnificent in its entire arrangement. It was an artistic combination of "*motives*" from the flower and animal kingdoms which would have delighted the eye of a painter of still life. Each one of the small tables, which were so placed that conversation with the neighbouring ones could be carried on without any difficulty, had its own peculiar floral adornment; on one, the centre-piece was a beautiful mass of La France roses; on another, Maréchal Neils; a third was arranged with white carnations; a fourth, with lilacs; another, with lilies of the valley; another, with gardenias. The large bouquets for the women, and the boutonnières for the men, were a repetition of the centre-pieces.

Hugo was really touched as he looked at all this beauty, and said to himself that it was Leonie's love for him that had prepared it all. He pressed her arm, which lay in his, close to his heart, and Leonie whispered softly to him what he had just been thinking: "Yes, my dearest, I have done all this for you. I am very happy!"

"I, too," answered Hugo, with a deep sigh.

"And now do not spoil my perfect happiness



by thanking me too extravagantly for this trifle," she whispered further, as they stood before the bronze. "I have ordered it for you. Put it in your rooms; and, when you look at it, think of the night of your first triumph and of me."

Hugo was incapable of a word. He shook his head and looked at Leonie with a passionate glance of tender gratitude.

"Does the bronze please you?" asked Welsheim, who had approached them and was enjoying Hugo's surprise. He lowered his voice at the same time. "It isn't necessary for any one to know that I have permitted myself the little joke. I beg you, dear friend, no word of thanks! But it is really beautiful! Ah, these Frenchmen! If we were only as far advanced! But, no! You shall not thank me! Put the thing in your room in remembrance of your first success—and of us!"

The guests in the mean time had taken their places, and the gayest spirits prevailed during the supper. Towards one o'clock, when the ices were served, Welsheim rose and tapped on his glass. Welsheim was a good after-dinner speaker. He spoke briefly, clearly, ably, and continually found clever turns which aroused great merriment. To-night he was especially happy in his remarks. Laughter followed each sentence, and all joined



uproariously in the toast to the successful young author, Welsheim's good friend Dr. Hugo Hall.

While the glasses clinked merrily together, the toast song, "Hoch soll er leben," was raised at one of the corner tables where some of the young people were assembled. The youthful leaders of the strain had begun too high, and in the two closing measures their voices failed them. They decided immediately on a bold transition to a lower key,

But now Vallini took up the refrain, and the last two notes, B and C, rang out with such strength and fulness and sweetness that all looked at one another in complete astonishment. And for the second and third time resounded those wonderful notes, more full and rounded, more powerful and melodious, than had ever before issued from a human throat. It was an exulting cry of victory, a stirring shout of triumph, indescribably impressive, which made the guests, who had risen, involuntarily throw back their heads open their lips, and gaze with wondering eyes at the fearless herald of song.

For the third and last time resounded Vallini's "Dreimal hoch!" The others had ceased singing. He stood there, waving his champagne-glass in his uplifted hand, and while he held the last, highest tone in bewildering sweetness, and let the *fortis-*



*simo* gradually die away into the softest *pianissimo*, he looked with a fiery, passionate, ominous gaze straight at Leonie, who was breathing rapidly through her parted lips and staring at him as though hypnotized.

Again the glasses clinked merrily. As soon as they were replaced on the table, a general exclamation arose, accompanied by loud and prolonged clapping.

"Will you not drink with me?" asked Hugo softly, in a tone of gentle reproach.

"Pardon me!" answered Leonie, and, as if awakening from a trance, she hastily seized her glass and touched it so impetuously to her lover's that it broke into fragments, and the wine, foaming up again, spilt over the table-cloth.

Hugo looked at her in surprise.

"That brings good fortune," she said with a forced smile, but failing in her attempt to hide her preoccupation from Hugo's dark eyes.

"Glück und Glass, wie schnell bricht das!" replied Hugo, with an uneasy foreboding.

Leonie found no word in answer. She was still spellbound. The wondrous tones still lingered in her ears. They had affected her like an electric shock. They had mastered and subjugated her. She felt that the man opposite had subjected



her to a foreign will, that he imperiously commanded her to forget all his foolish absurdities and to admire him. And she bowed obediently to the stronger power of the irresistible magician. She tolerated his insolent glances without repelling him; she was constantly forced to look at him, and answer his smile. She had lost the mastery over herself—she did it without inclination, without hypocrisy, simply because she had to. She had forgotten that Hugo was beside her, and neither did she notice how thoughtful and grave he had become, nor how they two, who always had something to say to each other, had been completely silent for some time, while around them was nothing but joking, chattering, and laughing.

Suddenly she heard close to her ear, “I think it time to leave the table.” It was Welsheim who had stepped behind her and bent over her.

She started back. “What did you say?” she asked in astonishment.

“We had better leave the table; the men are longing for their cigars.”

“Ah, yes—very well.”

She rose, the others followed her example, and she mechanically took Hugo’s arm.

While they slowly betook themselves to the drawing-rooms, Hugo said in real alarm: “What



is the matter with you? You seem changed all at once."

"You are always finding fault with me! There is nothing the matter!" she answered, almost angrily.

"If I were disposed to be jealous," continued Hugo, deeply pained by Leonie's unkindness, "I should almost be inclined to think that the famous 'piper' had charmed you too with his high C. Since the 'hoch' which the man sang by himself, you have not spoken a single word to me. You must admit that it would be a cruel irony, if this very evening and these very festivities, which are really given in my honour, should lead to a fatal change in our relations. You exchanged looks with that man, that—"

"You are unbearable!" retorted Leonie with unconcealed annoyance. It angered her to find that Hugo had read her thoughts. "I surely cannot have ears and eyes for no one but you, in my own drawing-rooms!"

"I have never required that. But I frankly confess to you that this Vallini—"

"What have you against Vallini? Here is another one you can't endure. Shall I sacrifice him also to your humours as I have so many others? Well, I tell you plainly that I will not do it, and



that I look upon Signor Vallini as a very valuable acquisition. He is an agreeable man and a great singer. He pleases me and the others. Besides, I also have a word to say here, and I do not need to give in silently to all these despotic whims."

During this conversation, which had been carried on in low but distinct voices, they had reached the large drawing-room. Leonie dropped Hugo's arm, without feeling any desire for a reconciliation, and began to exchange greetings and the customary wishes for a "gesegnete Mahlzeit" with her guests. She smiled absently, and looked towards the right, where Vallini was just leaving the young woman he had taken to supper. He seemed noble to her now. She was under the spell that had carried away so many foolish women, over whom she had been making merry scarcely an hour before. With a secret feeling of pleasure she saw that he was approaching her, and when he kissed her hand—quite differently from all the others—and his lips touched her wrist, a thrill passed over her and she trembled.

"When may I thank you for this delightful evening?" asked Vallini.

"When you wish—only do not wait too long."

"To-morrow, if you will permit— But I must confess that I am somewhat shy of people. When



would there be the greatest probability of finding you with only a few? I mean—”

“I quite understand. Well, if you will come at noon, you will run a great risk of being bored by me alone.”

“Then until to-morrow noon!”

He kissed her hand once more, and he felt how she trembled. With a satisfied smile he turned to the other women.

Hugo had seen all. Without hearing a word he had understood what had passed as completely as though Leonie had made the appointment with him. He drew out his handkerchief and wiped the drops from his forehead. He looked vacantly at Leonie, whom Welsheim had just approached.

Was this Welsheim stricken with blindness? Did he not see what was still so apparent, that Leonie was on the point of compromising herself with that fool of a Vallini, with that ridiculous lady-killer, whom capricious Nature had endowed with somewhat stronger vocal chords than other mortals—that was really his only advantage; how in mad foolhardiness she was taking under his very eyes the first step on the road which leads to shame, to the breaking of the marriage vows? This Welsheim saw none of all this—he who was usually so quick-witted a man?



A feeling of contempt curled Hugo's lip. Leonie and Felix suddenly appeared to him in an entirely different light since he had seen her with Vallini. He avoided drawing an *a posteriori* conclusion of himself and his relations to the two.

He approached Leonie. "I will slip away unnoticed," he said to her softly. "When may I see you to-morrow?"

"Not too early. I wish to sleep late. They will stay a good deal longer. Come to dinner, at six, as usual."

"I wish to see you alone."

"No sermons, I beg of you! I will not endure it any longer. I shall expect you at six."

"You need not expect me."

"As you please!"

"I once more heartily thank you for all your kindness."

"Don't mention it!"

"Leonie," whispered Hugo eagerly, and his voice trembled. "Is it possible that I am to leave you like this—and to-night?"

"What more can I say? You are unjust. You see how I do everything to give you pleasure, and you torment me with what I cannot alter. I am the hostess, I have to consider my guests and my



husband. If you will not understand, I cannot help it. People are looking at us. We cannot settle the matter to-night. And, above all, have the goodness not to preach me any more sermons. I really will not endure it any longer. I should have nerves like cords. Be reasonable! Come to dinner to-morrow."

"No!" answered Hugo coldly.

"I shall not ask you a third time," Leonie replied in the same tone, and turned to a neighbouring group.

As John handed Hall his umbrella and ulster in the anteroom, and slipped the tip into his waistcoat pocket with a smothered thanks, he added more distinctly, "About half an hour ago a lady asked for you, doctor."

"A lady?" Hugo asked absently. The matter had little interest for him in his present mood.

"Seemed to me like some one crazed about the theatre," smirked John.

"Indeed?—It is very possible!"

Without giving any further thought to the matter, he stepped out into the cold, dark, rainy autumn night. The driver of the first cab was about to clamber down from his box. Hugo had raised his umbrella and started on foot towards the Lindens. He was very downcast. In his de-



jected frame of mind he could not grasp what had happened. He thought of nothing in particular. With body bent forward to protect him from the rain, he hurried on, with ever-quickenings step, homewards.



## CHAPTER IX.

As Martha cautiously opened the door of the small bedroom, she heard the regular breathing of her mother, who was already fast asleep.

"Mamma," she called in a low voice.

No answer. Martha knew well the blessed sleep her mother always enjoyed. She was certain that she would not wake before the next morning. She carefully closed the door, went back on tiptoe to the sitting-room, and wrote on a sheet of paper in large letters: "Don't be uneasy, dear mamma. I have to go out; I shall be home again by one o'clock at the latest. I did not want to wake you; I will tell you everything. You will not distrust me.—Martha." She put the sheet in a prominent place under the lamp, so that in the improbable event of Mrs. Breuer's awakening and looking around for Martha, it would meet her eye at once. Then she donned her mackintosh, put on her hat, took her umbrella, key, and candle, and left the house as quietly as possible.

The heavy, continuous rain had emptied the



Unter den Linden, which was usually frequented even at this hour. Martha hurried along with rapid steps, hiding herself unnecessarily under her umbrella. Not far from the Brandenburg Gate she was accosted by a man going in the opposite direction. She did not understand him, and went on. In the dark, silent Thiergarten, in which she heard nothing but the monotonous roar of the rain, she grew fearful. She hurried so that she could hardly get her breath. Her heart beat violently. When she turned into the Victoria Strasse, she felt calmer. She already saw at a distance the brilliant illumination of the Welsheims' house on the opposite side of the street, otherwise dark and gloomy. She stood standing awhile before the house, in front of which was drawn up a long line of carriages and cabs. She saw the subdued light of the flower-entwined lamp in the bow window, saw the glittering chandeliers in the adjoining rooms, saw now to her surprise that the windows stood open, and wondered that the festively illuminated rooms seemed to be so empty of people. Only once she saw a shadow flit hurriedly by. It seemed to be a servant. The simple explanation that the guests might be assembled in the dining-room overlooking the garden did not occur to her.

She crossed over, squeezed through the narrow



space between the hind wheels of a carriage and the heads of the horses of the carriage behind, and resolutely entered the open door. The hall was bright, warm, and comfortable.

When she had taken a few steps and was about to ascend the stairs, she heard loud laughter and clapping, the clinking of glasses; she heard cheers, and then the beginning of the song, "Hoch soll er leben!" The chorus was uncertain, and then a wonderful tenor voice joined in, and the "Dreimal hoch!" rang out with wondrous power. Martha stopped involuntarily on the lowest step and listened. Twice again she heard the ravishing voice. Then the glasses clinked again, and long, loud applause followed, amidst universal cheering.

Martha slowly mounted the stairs. The servant in the anteroom stood at the closed doors of the dining-room, from which came a loud murmur of conversation. He had been listening to the song; now he heard her and turned around.

"Excuse me," said Martha softly. "Is Dr. Hall here?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Thank you."

As she turned away, she heard a glass shiver into fragments. She pressed her hand to her heart, as though something had broken there too.



John looked at her in astonishment, but he was too well trained a servant to wonder long.

Martha was so composed that she was surprised at herself. She only felt a deadly exhaustion. In spite of the storm, she went a few houses farther. Then she stepped under a gaslight, took out her pocket-book and counted the contents. She was relieved to find that she had something like a dollar with her.

She turned and took a cab and was driven to the Brüder Strasse, after she had paid the fare demanded. As she was jolted roughly here and there on the hard cushions of the rattling cab, she thought over what had happened and what must now happen, with stony calmness. Only her reason was at work—her feelings were completely dulled.

Unconscious of how she had come, she entered her home once more. Her written explanation to her mother lay undisturbed under the lamp. She opened the wet umbrella and placed it on the floor. She divested herself of the mackintosh and the soaking shoes. She took an unusually long time. After each motion she was obliged to rest a moment, to recover her exhausted strength. She tore the note to pieces, which she had destined for her mother, and placed a fresh sheet on the table before her and gazed at the white page.



She took up the pen several times, but she was so weak that she could not write. Her hands sank feebly to her side, and, leaning back in her chair, she let her head with its heavy burden of hair fall backwards. At each breath came a hoarse rattle from her open lips, aggravated every now and then by a hard, dry cough. From time to time she pressed her hand tightly to her breast.

Finally, she mastered herself. She began deliberately to write the following in a large, firm hand whose bold characters would hardly have been attributed to so fragile a girl.

*"The night of September 30 to October 1, 1873.*

"DEAR HUGO: I give you back your word and your freedom. I can never be yours. Later, when I am calmer, I will give you the reasons for my resolve, if you care to hear them. For the present it is best that we should neither meet nor speak.

MARTHA."

She wrote the address, and without sealing it she took the letter with her to the bedroom. She undressed with great difficulty. As she lay down she heard Hugo come in, and wondered that he had left so early. She stared into the darkness with wide opened eyes. She heard her mother's



regular breathing, the roar of the storm, and heard the hoarse, rattling sound which accompanied her own breathing.

When she realised that she should not see Hugo for a long, long time, perhaps never again, her eyes grew moist, and she felt the hot tears roll down her cheeks. But the thought that the bond between her and Hugo was broken forever pained her far less than she had thought it would. It even gave her a certain feeling of relief to know that the unworthy lie was at an end. She had suffered too much during the last months to be particularly susceptible to pain now. She was very grave, sad, and sorrowful, but she was calm and resigned.

At last she fell into a heavy, unrefreshing sleep, from which she awoke to full consciousness when her mother rose at her usual hour, half past six.

Martha raised herself a little.

"Good morning, mamma."

"What! Awake already? Good morning!"

"I have scarcely slept at all. I feel very weak and hardly like getting up. Perhaps you will send the porter's little girl for Dr. Lohausen."

The widow had bent over the bed and lovingly kissed Martha's forehead. She took the hot, dry hand between her own.



"You are feverish again, my poor child," she said with tender solicitude. "Shall I give you some of the drops?"

"I would rather wait until the doctor comes. Don't worry. It is nothing serious. By and by, dear mamma, when you have dressed and breakfasted, I would like to tell you something—By and by," she repeated with feeble smile in answer to her mother's questioning glance.

Half an hour later the widow sat by her sick daughter's bed and listened with a grave, almost gloomy face to her words.

"Please let me speak undisturbed, dear mamma; I am too weak to take up the thread again after an interruption. I am certain that Hugo does not love me—does not love me enough for me to become his wife. He has nothing to reproach me with, and he wishes to spare me. So he has kept the truth from me. He was mistaken in his feelings when we became engaged; that is quite certain, mamma.

"He loves some one else, and I also know whom. I have thought it all over. Things cannot remain as they are. We are not suited to each other. We must break the engagement. Read this letter"—she took it from under her pillow—"and then give it to Hugo."



The widow had sat there with a stony face and listened to her daughter's feeble but resolute words. With the same calmness she read the letter and replaced it in its envelope without betraying in the slightest what was going on within her.

"You have acted wisely," she said after a pause. "I have seen for some time that it was coming. Your confidence alone made me waver in my opinion. No one who loves his affianced wife would act as he has. And now, my dear child—I do not say to you, put the matter out of your head—I do not demand impossibilities—I only ask you to be as reasonable, as calm as it is possible for you to be. Do not excite yourself, my poor Martha. For my sake, don't make yourself ill. Spare me that sorrow, my dear child, I beg you.—Ah, if we could only get away from here!"

"That is out of the question! Don't be worried. I shall be sensible."

"I would make any sacrifice, any sacrifice—if I could only carry you off somewhere—it doesn't matter where. Only out of this horrible house, out of this horrible city where you have nothing but sad associations. This is not a new idea. For weeks and months I have thought of nothing else. How can you regain your strength here, you poor



child? In this dim light, in this bad air, in this continual agitation! Oh, it is hard, hard, hard!"

She gazed with infinite sorrow and tenderness at her sick child who lay before her with closed eyes.

"Perhaps the good God will help us," she sighed. "We have done nothing wrong." Martha nodded and gave a faint smile, but her eyes remained closed.



## CHAPTER X.

WET to the skin and heated by his rapid walk, Hugo had reached home. He lit his lamp and rapidly stripped off his wet clothes. He did not think of going to sleep; even the thought of bed was repugnant to him. He flung on his dressing-gown and walked slowly up and down in his study.

He tried to collect himself, but he succeeded ill. Too much had come crushing down upon him within these last hours! He felt like a man shipwrecked, flung hither and thither in the furious, surging sea of his emotions. Was it really only a few hours—all these violent emotions within the short period of a few hours? That fever before and during the production of his play, that heavenly rapture in the moment of certain victory, that precious reward for all his labour, the compensation for all the hours of doubt in himself, the deadly uncertainty of his future, that satisfied feeling of joy at having found the right road, and now with confidence and trust dare to strive for



the highest goal—and then the reaction, the constraint of his dishonest and deceitful meeting with poor Martha, the unconquerable desire to share the evening's joy with Leonie, and there in the glittering rooms, the pleasure of gratified and flattered vanity, the delight of finding himself honoured by clever men and brilliant women, and the happiness of knowing himself loved by the woman he loved. And then—and then the incomprehensible, the inconceivable, the impossible ! The violent tearing asunder of the bond that seemed at that moment to be stronger than ever, Leonie's alienation from him who had never spoken an unkind word to her, who worshipped her more gratefully, loved her more passionately now than he had ever loved her before !

He could neither grasp the particulars nor the whole. He was almost without consciousness. He only felt the strong impulse to wrestle with, to ward off the hostile powers which were closing around him. But ever anew, something mocking, scornful, superior, seized him and thrust him back into the vortex. And this rough, stronger power embodied itself in the figure of a smiling, handsome man who seemed laughable and terrible at the same moment. He saw him everywhere, this Vallini ; try as he would to picture Leonie to him-



self, and to unravel the dark enigma of her cold repulse, it was always Vallini's fatal, smiling face that obtruded itself, and when in the recollection of Leonie's attitude he asked himself in desperation, "How can it be possible?" there seemed to echo in his ears, in answer, the wonderful melody of a man's voice, "Dreimal hoch!"

What could it all mean? He saw no escape from this wretched complication. He only knew that this day, which had been the happiest in his life, had likewise brought him the greatest sorrow. Leonie was lost to him, irrevocably lost!

With a deep sigh he sank into the chair before his desk. How was he to live or breathe or work without Leonie? Not until now did he realise, in the keen bitterness of his loss, what she had been to him. She was his one interest in life; all his thoughts and feelings had centred about her. In her jealousy, which he had found so charming as being an evidence of her love, she had allowed him no intimates, no friends, no harmless enjoyments; she had wished to be everything to him, and she had compensated him for everything. She was his friends, his family, his stimulus, his comfort, his love, all in one. She had alienated him from the poor girl who, unknown to him, was tossing feverishly in the next room that very hour,



and mourning over her lost happiness. Leonie had been everything, everything to him. She had enthralled his mind and led him where she would by the power of her love. She had twined herself about him ; he had been happy over it, and, in his pride at having won the brilliant woman, had not been conscious that she had taken the light and air away from him.

Involuntarily he looked up at the hanging moss suspended from his bookcase. At her only visit to him, Leonie had asked him to tell her about this beautiful but deadly decoration of the trees, which brought down the strongest oaks by depriving them of air and light.

“ *Tillandsia usneoides*,” he said with a strange smile.

It was nearly six ; the cold, grey light of the dull autumn morning was already peeping in through the shutters, when Hugo at last decided to go to bed. But his sleep was broken and uneasy, and two hours later he rose and dressed himself. He wanted to find the porter and send him for the morning papers. As he opened the door to the stairs there stood the porter's little girl. She brought a message for Mrs. Breuer, that Dr. Lohausen would come as soon as possible. Hall offered to deliver the message, gave the child some



money, and told her to get all the papers she could. Then he returned to his room and rang. The widow appeared at the usual time, bringing him his coffee.

Her stern, rigid face struck Hugo immediately.

"Is it very serious?" he asked sympathetically. "Dr. Lohausen sends word that he will be here as soon as possible. Has Martha had a relapse?"

"She is not very well, but I hope it is nothing serious. She has made a grave resolution. This letter will tell you all."

Hugo held out his hand, in surprise, for Martha's letter. He opened it and scanned the few lines; then he read it over slowly once more, while the widow remained standing motionless, with tightly compressed lips. He dared not lift his eyes to the mother.

Almost mechanically he said to her, "But won't you sit down?"

"No, thank you."

"I am completely overcome," he finally managed to say. "I have feared this. I know that I have done Martha a great wrong. I don't know, now, how I shall atone for it; I am the only one at fault! I have long been conscious of my guilt. I would have confessed it long ago if I could have



brought myself to hurt the poor, weak child. I had thought and hoped. I cannot say it now. I am completely worn out by the excitement which has kept me awake all night. Show me a last kindness by listening to me another time, I beg of you! Tell me what I shall do, what I can do to lighten my conscience, to lighten poor Martha's sufferings. I will make any sacrifice, even the greatest sacrifice, for I feel that my conduct is unpardonable. I will excuse nothing, palliate nothing. My God!—that too! The poor, noble child! Tell me, I implore you, what can be done?"

Mrs. Breuer had made no attempt to soothe or to interrupt Hall, whose excitement constantly increased. She maintained the same cold, rigid manner. After a long pause, as she saw that he was awaiting an answer, she said mechanically: "Unfortunately, there is little to be done at present. All you can do is to obey Martha's wish—neither speak to her nor write to her. There is no necessity for further explanations. As her mother, I should now oppose any communication between you and my daughter; and if she had not already done what was right of her own accord, I should have forbidden any further intercourse between you."

"I will make arrangements to-day to relieve



you of the painful necessity of meeting me in your own house."

"I was about to request you to do so."

Hugo paced the room in the greatest agitation.

"I dare not ask for forgiveness. You cannot forgive me. But I am very wretched."

The widow answered nothing.

"That, then, was the last night I am to spend in your house," said Hugo with genuine emotion.

"A sorrowful night! And I must leave your house like this, driven away like a criminal, like an ingrate, as I am! And I cannot even thank you—for all your kindness—in the hard days! And now that the change which we longed for so ardently, and awaited so confidently, has come, now I run away like a rascal and leave you with anger and resentment towards me in your hearts."

He was silent awhile, in the hope that Mrs. Breuer would say one comforting or forgiving word, but he was mistaken. As though she had not heard his conscience-stricken cry of remorse, she said, with business-like calmness, after a long pause:

"Then I may dispose of my two front rooms from to-day on?"

"Yes, I will try to send away my things in the course of the morning, as soon as it is possible."



The widow slightly inclined her head in assent.

"Then we have nothing further to say to each other," she said, in the same cold tone, preparing to leave the room.

Hugo stepped towards her; he gave her an earnest, entreating look, and tried to take her hand. The widow turned and left the room without another word. He looked after her with a bitter laugh, and nodded. The angry veins stood out on his forehead; he stamped his foot, tore the hanging moss from the bookcase, crushed it beneath his heel, and cried between his teeth:

"Wo man sie anfasst, morsch in allen Gliedern!  
Man weiss, man sieht's, man kann es greifen,  
Und dennoch tanzt man, wenn die Luder pfeiffen!"

And while he thrust away the grey-green tendrils with his foot, he said: "It will do for packing. This is the end of my happiness!"

The porter's little daughter brought the papers.

"Tell your father to get me two reliable men, and ask him if he will help me in packing. If so, ask him to come up as soon as possible."

"Very well, Herr Doctor!"

Hugo hurriedly scanned the papers. They were all, without exception, very favourable; and even the least friendly confirmed the startling success



What a different effect it would have had upon him before ! But he was almost stunned. He must set about getting his things together. As he took up Martha's wreath with the embroidered ribbons, his eyes grew moist.

For three hours the porter and the men made havoc in Hugo's two rooms, under his direction. The baskets and boxes were filled. The rooms looked dreary and empty. Towards noon the laborious work was finished. Hugo went out. He took the first lodging he found that seemed reasonably convenient—somewhat larger, somewhat dearer, and somewhat better furnished, and in the Tauben Strasse. At one o'clock he left the house in the Brüder Strasse with a heavy, heavy heart.

It was indescribably cheerless in the new lodgings. The boxes and baskets stood unpacked in the large living-room. Hugo looked forward with real horror to the arranging of his books. He had packed all that he needed in his travelling case, and even the arrangement of these indispensable articles was exceedingly annoying to him.

He felt entirely broken down, but he could not stay in this strange, disorderly room, in which everything looked so unfamiliar and unfriendly. The weather had become fine again, the sun was shining, and, although somewhat cool, it was bright



and clear. He turned in the direction of the Thiergarten.

He walked along slowly, and any one who saw him so pale and haggard, with dark rings under his eyes, would have taken him for a convalescent who had exerted himself to leave the sick-room in order to enjoy the sunshine and to find strength in the fresh air. Luckily, he met no acquaintances.

The picture of the sick, forsaken Martha, which had unmercifully tormented him during the last few hours, vanished as he stepped under the trees of the Thiergarten. It was the way he had always taken to go to her—to Leonie. And again he was overwhelmed by the violent emotions against which he had battled to exhaustion during the preceding night of horror. Had she really forsaken him? Was he never again to draw her trembling to his heart, never to kiss the fresh mouth again? Was a tender, longing glance from those blue-gray eyes never to rest upon him again; was he never more to hear an ardent, loving word from her lips?

But, after all, she had deceived her husband for him—why should she not deceive him also for another? Distrust, the inevitable result of that infidelity which had made him happy, had taken full possession of him. He was jealous to mad-



ness of Vallini, with whom Leonie, as well as other women, might have fallen in love--had fallen in love.

How had he bewitched her? She was keen and critical; he was a vain, ridiculous fool. She must have seen through him. But must it be probable to be true? Was not the improbable generally the rule in love affairs? Who dared flatter himself that he knew the secrets of a woman's heart? Who could understand the extravagant desires, the crazy fancies of women? Love, material and spiritual, perhaps was really nothing, after all, but something mechanical. Perhaps Lucrece was right, perhaps all the noble and exalted feelings which we mistakenly locate in the heart are bodily emanations which come in contact with others whose constituent parts either mingle or do not, are drawn together or repel, call forth favorable feelings or repulsion, sympathy or antipathy, love or hatred. Perhaps this absurd man possessed a mysterious power which paralyzed and overpowered Leonie's soul and senses, which made her weak and took away her will. Yet he himself had experienced her superior force. She had fettered him without his making the slightest attempt to free himself. She had silenced the voice of duty within him, had hardened his heart against the pitiable victim of his rashness. Perhaps in the



terrible irony of Fate she too had now found her master in this insignificant creature, who was nothing more than a so-called handsome man with a magnificent voice.

He thought of that day, so fateful for him, when he had gone to her with the firm resolve to break off his friendly relations with her, to be no longer untrue, even in thought, to his affianced wife, and had left her, her lover. And with a wonderful power of retrospection, all the incidents of that hour rose before his excited imagination. Now, however, he was no longer one of the actors; he was only the invisible spectator who was forced against his will to witness a repugnant scene in which Vallini took his former part.

Hugo, without knowing it, had reached the corner of the Thiergarten and Bellerne Strasse, when he was greeted in an offensive manner by a rather extravagantly dressed man, who wore his hat a little on one side. It was Vallini, who passed him with a jaunty air and a smile of beaming self-satisfaction.

Hugo started as from a dream. He stood still a moment and gazed after the singer, who cheerfully paraded his good looks, fame, and elegance before the admiring crowd under the trees of the Siegesallee.



What was truth, and what a dream? Was it a visionary presentiment of the truth? And how far did truth enter into what he had seen in imagination? The drops stood out on his forehead.

He went hesitatingly up the Victoria Strasse, and hesitatingly he ascended the steps of the house.

He heard the sound of the slide being pushed back, but some time passed before the door was opened.

“Madame is very sorry—but she is very much fatigued by last night’s entertainment. The Herr Doctor will kindly excuse her.”

John brought out the lie which had been enjoined upon him with some uncertainty; as Hugo looked at him sharply, the man, who could see that Hugo knew the excuse to be false, dropped his eyes.

Hugo returned to the Thiergarten in the same slow pace, with heavy, dragging steps. As he suddenly turned around in the street he saw that Leonie, who had thought herself hidden by the flower stands in the bow window, was looking after him, but dipped her head like a duck as she perceived his movement. Too late! Hugo had seen her plainly, saw her still, behind the flowers: she wore a new, coquettish, pale-blue morning gown that he



had never seen before; the loose black hair framed her white face.

At the corner he took a cab. He felt so exhausted that he did not trust himself to find the short way back on foot.

He scarcely answered cheerful Mrs. Bennemann, his new landlady, who asked him good-naturedly if she could be of any assistance to him. He did not look around the comfortless room, but flung himself fully dressed on the couch, without even taking off his overcoat and gloves, and in a few moments fell into a heavy, leaden sleep.



## CHAPTER XI.

EARLY in the afternoon Hugo's deserted lodgings were restored to a presentable condition by the widow and the woman who came daily to help in the heavier work. To be sure, the large room looked somewhat bare and inhospitable, but everything was in spotless order. The windows were cleaned and fresh curtains put up.

It pleased the widow to think that she had a better reception-room than usual at her disposal, for she had an unexpected caller. Mr. Felix Welsheim, who never forgot a commission of his wife's, had gone directly from the Stock Exchange to Mrs. Breuer's.

She conducted him to the front room. She thought it unnecessary to tell Mr. Welsheim that Hugo had left her house. She had simply answered in the negative to the question if the doctor was at home.

"To tell the truth, I'm not sorry not to meet the doctor," began Welsheim, as he accepted the



invitation to be seated, "for it is precisely about him that I wish to have a serious talk with you. I am a plain business man, and I have little fondness for fine phrases. I am only led by the interests of my best friend, which are yours equally. You see, my dear madame, that I have been watching our good doctor for some months, and closely—there is something in his manner—how shall I put it?—something that is not natural. He seems to be depressed—don't you think so? He must have made the same impression upon you? I have investigated matters, and I think I'm on the right track—pardon me if I am too blunt. But you are a sensible woman, with whom one can speak plain English. I think—no, I am sure—that the engagement with Miss Martha—it is that which depresses him. But he is a man of honour, and could never bring himself to hurt the young lady; he would keep to the engagement from a feeling of duty—Yes, that is all very well; but what will come of it? No good, surely! Your daughter would be wretched and the doctor also. And a youthful blunder—good Lord! we have all been young once—I think a youthful blunder would be rather dearly paid for by the unhappiness of two people. So I say to myself: Once the evil is known, then for a speedy and resolute remedy, even if it should



hurt for a time. And if the patients themselves are not aware of it, then we, their best friends, must act for them. What do you think?"

The widow had listened with that hard, immovable expression which was peculiar with her when important matters were transpiring. Welsheim had no suspicion that he was troubling himself unnecessarily, and that what he had set to work to bring about was already an accomplished fact.

"I agree with you perfectly," answered the widow.

"Excellent, excellent!" cried Welsheim, visibly flattered by the success of his eloquence, which had so often done him good service at the meetings of the Board of Trade. "If we agree on the main point, that it is our duty to bring the young people to the recognition of their mistake, we will soon agree on the details. I will undertake the doctor. I shall talk rather big, and explain to him that the literary beginner, who engages himself to a modest young girl from a highly respectable family, is quite another man from Hugo Hall, the author of 'Hercules and Omphale,' who, from so-called honourable scruples, keeps from breaking a bond already practically broken. This new Hugo Hall has duties towards mankind. He dare not marry a fine girl whom he does not love



sufficiently to be made and to make happy. He ought not to wilfully kill his wonderful talents through a mistaken idea of his real duties—and so on! We will soon settle it. To you, dear madame, falls the harder task of convincing your daughter of the impossible state of affairs as they now stand. Without interfering in any way with your plans, I would make the humble suggestion that, if the two were separated for the time being, it would do away with a great deal of unpleasantness. We can easily overcome the difficulties in the way, and I would like to settle this point with you quietly and finally.”

At this moment the door-bell rang. The widow rose.

“Excuse me for a moment. I shall be at your service immediately.”

She purposely left the door open, to give Mr. Welsheim to understand that a shortening of the visit would be agreeable to her, for she had to receive the doctor whom she had been expecting.

It was in fact Dr. Lohausen, whom the widow ushered in.

“I could not manage to get here any sooner,” remarked the doctor apologetically. “Now, then, what is wrong this time?” he continued, in his kindly, sonorous voice.



"Martha has been sleeping for two hours. I will take you to her at once, doctor. It is the same high fever again," answered the widow.

Welsheim had pricked up his ears. He recognised the voice. He was not mistaken; as he stuck his head through the door, he saw his old friend and family physician, Dr. Lohausen.

"Doctor!" he exclaimed, in delighted surprise. "What a lucky meeting!"

"Mr. Welsheim! Why, what are you doing here?"

"I am having a conference with Mrs. Breuer."

"Well, go on quietly with your conference. I will take a look at our little patient in the mean time."

"Could you spare me a moment first? Unfortunately, my time is limited, and I'm afraid I can hardly wait until you have seen your patient. Five minutes will be enough.—Will you allow me, my dear madame?"

"Certainly—I will wake Martha," she added to the doctor.

Lohausen stepped into the front room with Welsheim.

"It must have been fine at your house last night. The whole Thiergarten is chanting your praises. I was so sorry that I couldn't come."



"Yes, it went off very well, I must say. What a voice that Vallini has!"

"I have heard all about it. *Hoch soll er leben!*"

"Now to business! You are the family physician here?"

"To be sure."

"Indeed! Do Mrs. Breuer's means admit of—"

"My means admit of my doing all I can to be of service to my old friend Breuer's daughter."

"So I supposed. Now, my dear doctor, I want to ask you a plain question, and the answer concerns me deeply. How is the young lady? I know her but slightly, but she looks to me as if she were in a bad way."

"I shall be committing no indiscretion if I say it to you that the poor child is exceedingly frail and delicate. She should go away to some milder climate, to a purer air and a warmer sun."

"Why don't you send her to Italy?"

Lohausen stared at him.

"I don't send her because she could not go."

Welsheim moved his first and second finger rapidly back and forth under his thumb. The doctor understood the pantomime and nodded assent.

"But that must be remedied," said Welsheim.



The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"You know I'm no lover of fine speeches. If you think it necessary that the young lady and her mother should spend six months or a year in Italy, the two thousand marks or so which are needed are at your disposal."

"What!" cried Lohausen, in open astonishment.

"It will make me no poorer. I admit that I have placed fifty per cent. of my earnings on change to-day to Mrs. Breuer's account. And when it comes to be a question of a young girl's health—"

"You do not know how much good you are doing! In my honest opinion as a doctor, it is a question of a human life. The girl will surely die if she stays here; in Italy she may hope to regain her health."

"So much the better," said Welsheim, who, during the doctor's last words, had already taken out his purse and counted out a considerable sum. "That will be enough to begin with. For any further needs, I am, of course, at your disposal."

Lohausen took the money and shook Welsheim heartily by the hand.

"You are a splendid fellow—a splendid fellow! Once more I thank you heartily."



"I have one thing more to say, though I scarcely need to, for of course it is understood: my name must not be mentioned, on any account. It would be unpleasant both for me and for Mrs. Breuer. You, as an old family friend, can say it is another old friend—or yourself. There, you can arrange the matter some way!"

"You are a fine fellow!" repeated Lohausen, with an earnest shake of the hand. "It is a noble deed, and it impresses me deeply. You can gain neither distinction nor honour by it, but, if you care for the respect of an honest man, you have it, my dear Welsheim!"

"It is not worth speaking of, doctor! And now go to your patient. And would you kindly tell Mrs. Breuer that I should like to take leave of her?"

With another shake of the hand, and a face radiant with pleasure, the doctor betook himself to the little bedroom. He knew that he carried the best medicine in his pocket.

The interview between Welsheim and Mrs. Breuer lasted a few moments longer. The widow, who longed to be at her child's bedside with the doctor, contented herself with coldly thanking Mr. Welsheim for his friendly interest, and with making the startling announcement that she had al-



ready talked the matter over seriously with her daughter, and that Martha was also convinced that matters could not go on as they were.

“But the two must be separated!” exclaimed Welsheim. “That is the principal thing! Otherwise they will be falling into each other’s arms at the first meeting. Young people—is it not so?”

“We shall see,” was the widow’s calm answer.

Welsheim smiled contentedly as he stepped into his carriage and was driven quickly home. The rapidity and completeness of his success impressed even him. How Leonie would rejoice when he told her of his victory!

To his genuine delight the doctor found Martha’s condition far less critical than he had feared. He had had a little talk in the sitting-room with the widow. Her stony face had brightened in unspeakable gladness as he told her what had happened, and she could not restrain her tears of joy before the faithful old friend who patted her kindly on the shoulder, and said, every now and then: “There, there, that will do! Be sensible! zum Teufel!”

“And I cannot thank this noble friend?”

“You will thank him by your child’s regained health—but in no other way.”



"Ah, doctor, I can hardly believe it! Can I really accept it? Can I?"

"I have already accepted it for you. And how much more should you take it for your child's sake! There is my answer."

"For my poor child! And now you hope—?"

"The best, my dear friend, the best!"

"I cannot believe it, I cannot realize it! How wrong we are to doubt man's goodness! Yes, there are still good men! And when the need is greatest help is nearest."

"Now to come to practical matters: don't lose any time! Make all preparations for striking your tent as soon as possible—for six months or a year—the doctor there will tell you that. I think that Martha is equal to travelling. I shall come again to-morrow. I should like it if I could send her off at once. But she must not attempt to return until the doctor there gives her permission. Good-bye, until to-morrow!"

Welsheim had reached home. He sprang up the stairs more rapidly than was his custom, and rushed into the bow-window room so impetuously that Leonie, who stood behind the flower stands, looking down the street, started back in affright.

"Hello!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "Your hair not yet dressed?" And, as he kissed her fore-



head, he said with a smile: "Do you know, you look the best just like this! People don't know how beautiful you can be! I am proud to think that you are so beautiful just for me." He kissed her again on the forehead. "Besides," he went on playfully, "*madame est servie!* Everything is arranged. Spoke with the mother, spoke with the doctor, engagement to be broken—the little one sent to Italy—my name not mentioned. Everything unobtrusive! I am to undertake our good Dr. Hugo. I shall soon settle him."

Leonie had not at first grasped what Felix meant. Not until he mentioned Hugo did it become clear to her. Instead of the warm congratulations which Welsheim expected to hear from his wife's lips, what was his astonishment to hear nothing but reproaches!

"There was no such great hurry about the matter!" exclaimed Leonie, whose forehead had settled into a deep frown.

"What!" replied Felix, completely astounded. "You said to me—"

"Said!" broke in Leonie in the same annoyed tone. "One says a good deal! But when such serious things are involved, the *pros* and *cons* are usually carefully weighed. After the experience I had last evening, I should scarcely have advised



you to play the part of Providence to Dr. Hall."

"Why, what happened unusual last night?" asked Welsheim, in astonishment; "for you can't be speaking of the play."

"Scarcely anything unusual, for it has become an every-day occurrence, and I should have spoken of it long ago, had I not feared that a change in our relations with Dr. Hall before the first night might be regarded as a base desertion. We will be spared this reproach if we begin to treat him a little coldly after his triumph is assured."

"I don't understand what you mean. Why should things be any different between us and the doctor?"

"Because I will not stand his conduct any longer! That is all!"

"But what has he done all of a sudden?"

"He tyrannizes over me in the most insupportable fashion; if you must know, he had gradually assumed rights here, without our noticing it, that do not belong to him. He wishes to rule here. This doesn't please him, and that doesn't please him. I speak too loudly; I am too familiar with this person or that; one gown is too striking, another cut too low! So it goes. I am always in mortal terror lest any one should overhear how he



lords it over me. For it doesn't disturb him in the slightest. And if any one were to watch us, the very worst might be thought of me! Do you know what I think, what alone can explain his conduct? I almost believe he is in love with me!"

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Felix, in the greatest astonishment.

"If he were my lover and possessed all the defects of a jealous husband, which you fortunately do not possess, his conduct could not be otherwise. It is intensely disagreeable to me—not on my account alone."

"Hm! hm!" muttered Welsheim. He reflected for a moment, though without any very deep regret, that if Leonie had told him this earlier, he might have been two thousand marks in pocket."

"To be sure, you cannot put up with that!" Felix said, after a short pause, in a tone of deepest conviction. "And I shall not put up with it either. So it came to a crisis last night? How did it happen?"

"He catechised me as usual about my amiability towards my guests. He wished to give me advice as to how I should act towards Signor Vallini. And it was to him especially that I was under the greatest obligations."

"To be sure! We have him to thank for the



brilliant success of our first reception, him alone. The whole Exchange was full of '*Hoch soll er leben.*' I don't know how we can compensate him. He probably has plenty of cravat pins."

"For that very reason I thought it my duty to be especially friendly towards him. And it was about that, that Dr. Hall saw fit to make a scene. I was indignant, and I spoke my mind plainly to him."

"You did perfectly right!"

"He was very much offended. But I can't help it. I have nothing to regret, nothing to retract. Oh, yes, I had almost forgotten—Signor Vallini was here. A very nice man, as you see."

Welsheim looked somewhat disconcerted at this carelessly spoken remark.

"And you received him? In this way?" He lifted a curly lock of the beautiful hair.

Leonie gave a ringing laugh.

"Are you going to be jealous at last? It seems to be contagious. If you had let me finish, you would have learned that I did not receive him. We exchanged endearments through the door—he on one side, I on the other—and you could have listened in perfect peace as to everything I said. For the very reason that I could not show myself, and as it is my duty to be especially polite to



Signor Vallini, I have invited him to dine with us to-night, *sans façon*. You might get a box."

"The theatres are utterly unattractive to-night. We should have to see 'Hercules and Omphale' a second time," he added jestingly.

"That would not be so bad," answered Leonie, with perfect seriousness. "I did not see much of the play last night; I was too excited, on account of our reception."

"What, you really wish to go?"

"Really," assented Leonie.

"It is utterly impossible, my dear Leonie! Bought up to the last seat—everything."

"You can always get something from the speculators. And you know my confidence in your ingenuity."

"Then I should have to go myself, and Vallini is coming to dine with us at six."

"Then we will dine later. We need not be there at the beginning. And while you are securing the seats, I will try to fascinate the singer with all the charms of feminine art, and console him for having to wait half an hour for his soup."

"I will try, but I have little hope."

"I have all the more. It would be the first time you have ever disappointed me."



Felix kissed his wife. As he turned towards the door, he stopped for a moment and said:

"In passing I noticed the bronze group of 'Hercules and Omphale.' We shall have to send it to the doctor."

"I will see to it. After last night's scene it would not do to send it to-day."

"Very well. You see to it! I think I can be back by half past six; but I am afraid that I shall come with empty hands."



## CHAPTER XII.

VALLINI appeared punctually at six o'clock. He had made himself very fine. In his button-hole was a half-opened Maréchal Niel bud, carefully arranged so as not to conceal the neighbouring rosette of bright-coloured ribbon. Leonie had also chosen her toilet with particular care and looked charming.

For the first time in her life she felt a certain embarrassment as she rose and extended her hand for the singer to kiss. Yet there was a trace of sadness in her smile.

"You are more punctual than we can be to-night," she began, after they had seated themselves. "My husband is detained and will not be home for half an hour. I have promised him until then to—"

At this delightful news Vallini looked at her with a tender, languishing glance, and bent forward so as to bring his face nearer hers. But she



drew back, and said in a cold, reproving, almost angry tone, "Ah, I beg of you!"

The singer seemed to have little expected this rebuff, and he looked foolish and nonplussed.

"I am very glad," continued Leonie in the same tone, "that this undisturbed interview gives me the opportunity of exchanging something besides trivialities with you. I shall not make myself so ridiculous as to say to you, 'What must you think of me!' But I am very anxious that you should learn to know me better. You left a crazy woman when you went away this noon—I do not know what you did to me. A rational woman is speaking to you now; I was beside myself—I have now come to my senses."

"But, my charming friend," broke in Vallini, with a smile, "why do you speak of it? My discretion—"

"You need not attempt to reassure me," Leonie interrupted, in dismay. "Do you suppose that it is fear that drives me to speak to you in this way? I am seeking refuge—but not from others. I am seeking refuge from myself—from my torturing thoughts."

"Why do you torture yourself?" said Vallini, who did not understand Leonie at all. "You take the matter in far too tragic a way."



Leonie looked in surprise at the man who sat opposite her, stroking his moustache. In an instant she felt herself removed a thousand miles from him. He lived in quite another world, in quite another atmosphere.

"I met him when I left you this morning," Vallini went on, glad to be able to place the conversation on the firm footing of facts.

"Whom?" asked Leonie indifferently.

"Our good doctor," answered Vallini, with a contemptuous laugh. "He looked wretchedly."

"You are speaking of Dr. Hall? That the excitement of last night left its mark on him—"

"Oh, that is not it!" broke in the singer insolently. "The poor fellow is jealous." He attempted to take Leonie's hand to kiss it. Leonie rose.

"Jealous of you?" she said, with a strong emphasis.

"To be sure," answered Vallini, in a self-satisfied way.

"Why should he be?"

"Instinct, my dear lady!"

"And if he were to know all, why should he be jealous?"

"Well," said Vallini, after a while, in some embarrassment at this minute cross-examination, "I should think—if he knew—"



"I quite understand," cried Leonie mockingly. "You believe, as so many do, that Dr. Hall is my lover! Am I not right? Appearances do indeed seem to indicate as much! We are so much together; we are young—that is sufficient for people. Yet, in spite of all talk, there is nothing in it, strange to say. It is true that Dr. Hall is very congenial to me, as a man and as an author; that as very good friends our relations have been most intimate. We have never made a secret of it, for we had no reason to conceal anything. Anything else that people may say is nonsense or malice, foolish gossip or vulgar slander! There! Now you know all! And you are the only man who has had any interest in knowing the truth, and the only one to whom I have felt in duty bound to tell the truth!"

Vallini smiled more and more broadly.

"What is the use of exciting yourself so unnecessarily?" he said, with offensive magnanimity. "And if it were different from what you say, I should not take it amiss for a moment! I know the world! And I am much more tolerant than you think."

Leonie paled. All the blood rushed to her heart. She realized at that instant how she had lowered herself. That this man should look upon



her as one of a common herd—she could not endure the thought. He should not rank her so low! He must have a better opinion of her! She turned a helpless, troubled look upon him.

“I require no tolerance!” she exclaimed bitterly. “And if I should swear to you—”

“I believe you without that. I believe anything you wish. But let us drop these unpleasant subjects. Let us be happy. Comfort above everything—that is my principle! Besides, I must not excite myself so. I live for my art! One who has to express so much emotion on the stage, give up his very soul, his heart’s blood, must be sensible in ordinary life. I am no Philistine; I amuse myself as well as anybody, but I never forget what I owe to my art! If I lived in any other way, do you suppose I should have won the success I have everywhere? You have seen a sample of it here. But it was nothing in comparison with Dresden, Munich, Hamburg. You must have read it in the papers?”

Leonie nodded assent. She could not utter a word. A shudder ran through her. For a moment she could hardly restrain her anger, and she had the strongest desire to fling the insolent wretch, who showed his disrespect with such open and ungenerous brutality, out of the door. Then she



confessed to herself in bitter shame and contrition that her incomprehensible conduct was alone responsible for all the humiliation and insults she was now suffering. She realised at the same time that any attempt to make this man understand her would be perfectly useless. She made an effort to smile indifferently, and said at last, for the sake of saying something: "You are really to be envied. It must be a wonderful sensation to affect the people from the stage."

She closed her eyes for a moment in exhaustion, and sighed, as though she had accomplished a heavy task.

"The effect! That's it!" cried Vallini, who was now in his element. "You have hit the nail on the head! That is our only reward! I am really not conceited! But when one stands up there, when one feels what an effect one can produce through the power of art—it is something! Then one can well say to one's self, 'You give your best, your all, but you have not given it in vain!'"

"Yes, indeed!" answered Leonie, who had not been listening to a word. She was glad when the painful *tête-à-tête* with the tenor was interrupted by the noiseless entrance of her husband.

"You will be pleased with me," he cried, rather noisily, after he had shaken Vallini's hand and



kissed Leonie's forehead. "I have succeeded in getting three front seats. Don't ask me how! But you know your wish is law to me.—And now, my dear Vallini, give my wife your arm. If we want to see anything at all of the play, we must sit down to dinner immediately."

"Are you going to the theatre to-night?" asked Vallini, as he escorted Leonie to the dining-room.

"I did not tell you before, because I did not know whether my husband could get the seats," answered Leonie. "I intended asking you to accompany us to the theatre for an hour or so. I wished to see how the play would be received by the impartial audience of the second night. But I confess that the desire is gone, and I think we had better spend the evening comfortably together here."

They had entered the dining-room and taken their places at the round table, which was as profusely decorated with rare flowers as on great occasions.

Welsheim scarcely believed his ears.

"But permit me!" he exclaimed in comical indignation. "What was the use of my driving around for an hour and moving heaven and earth and interviewing all the speculators—just to have



you say, 'I have changed my mind'? No, my dear, that won't do! I have something to say now. —You see," he said, turning laughingly to Vallini, "how I tyrannize over my poor wife!"

Vallini relished the idea of showing himself again to-night before the admiring public, at the side of the famous Mrs. Welsheim; and if Dr. Hall, who would undoubtedly be at the theatre, should see them together, why, so much the better. The malicious joy he took in the thought only added zest to the idea.

"Why should we give up the seats?" he said in acquiescence. "I think it would be really very nice to spend an hour at the theatre after dinner. I join in the entreaties of your husband."

Leonie made a few more attempts to bring the men to her way of thinking, but she finally had to withdraw her opposition, when she plainly saw from Vallini's words that he thought that she feared to show herself before Dr. Hall at his side. Even if it were the truth, Vallini must not think so.

The dinner was very good, the wines excellent. Vallini carried on a monologue concerning himself and his successes. He was therefore in the gayest of humours. While the men were drinking their coffee and blissfully smoking their Henry Clays, Leonie prepared herself for the theatre.



Towards nine o'clock, during the impressive closing scene of the second act, while the audience was listening in breathless attention, there rose in one of the boxes an annoying stir which was angrily observed by many, and even greeted with hisses of protest by those who sat near by. Leonie, Welsheim, and Vallini took their places in the box, the only remaining seats in the house.

The attention of almost the entire house was directed for the moment from the stage to the new arrivals, and even the actors on the boards and behind the scenes were aware that something unexpected and unwonted had happened. The manager stuck his head far enough out of his latticed box to discover the cause of the disturbance.

"Those cursed parvenues!" he muttered between his teeth, loud enough to be heard by Hugo, who sat in a corner of the dark wing. "It is a shameful want of consideration. Our good friends again, of course! Our gracious hostess of yesterday—and the great Vallini must be there again as a matter of course!"

Hugo, who had awakened more tired than refreshed from his deep sleep, and had scarcely had time to pass the sponge over his head and dress himself for the theatre, so as to be on the spot at



the beginning of the play, heard the manager's words without much emotion. He bent forward a little and looked in the direction indicated, but his eyes were too blinded by the glare of the foot-lights to be able to distinguish anything in the darkened house. He saw only a gray-black mass with a few brighter touches here and there.

Fortunately, the occurrence had no unfavourable results. At the end of the act the applause was deafening, even more so than on the previous night. When the artists had appeared time after time, and the applause still continued, there suddenly rose—what was most unusual at a second performance—a call for the author. At first, from only a few. But this call found a general and enthusiastic echo. The clapping became more impetuous, and the calls more violent. With a radiant face the heroine hurried to the first wing and dragged the author—who this time resisted in earnest—out of his dark retreat, on to the brilliant stage, amidst the repeated, ever-increasing shouts of the audience.

Hugo was pitiably white. He bowed awkwardly, as yesterday, and as yesterday he glanced up at Leonie. But with a very different expression. Now he plainly saw the three. Dark, threatening, terrifying was his look as he saw



Leonie seated beside Vallini. For the second and third time he was forced to appear on the stage. He had now mastered himself, and looked straight ahead of him, at the restless, seething crowd which cheered him to the echo.

Leonie had placed too much reliance in herself. A sharp pain shot through her heart as she met Hugo's gaze. She alone had understood the look. She leaned back in her chair and heard a woman behind her say to her neighbour :

"The poor man looks really ill. His success seems to be too much for him. One is apt to think of a successful author as something very different. But he has an interesting face."

It was anything but unpleasant to Leonie that Vallini, who had many calls to make in the different boxes, left her alone between the acts with Felix. It was at least not necessary for her to speak.

The last act, of which Leonie heard but little, assured the overwhelming success of the play. As soon as the curtain had fallen, she left with her escort. In the corridor she heard the repeated calls for the author, and she was glad that she could not see the white face with the despairing eyes.

Vallini murmured a few commonplace words of



thanks for the pleasant evening, and was about to take his leave.

"I don't think that we need to separate quite yet," said Leonie, as they slowly descended the crowded stairs. "We might have a little supper somewhere—"

"Unfortunately, I must deny myself that pleasure," smirked Vallini. "An appointment—"

"Ah! Then I will not disturb your plans," Leonie answered, secretly much offended. It had never occurred to her before that any one could refuse an invitation of hers.

"I would gladly stay another hour or so with you," continued Vallini ingenuously. "But you can imagine how much I am in demand."

"Certainly! And when shall we see you again?"

"Very soon, of course! I cannot say definitely when. We artists are slaves to duty—you understand—"

"Perfectly."

"If possible, I will call to-morrow, to inquire how you are—but without any definite promise!"

Leonie nodded.

"Then, once more, dear madame, my obedient thanks! Mr. Welsheim—I have the honour!"

Welsheim had called the carriage. Vallini



waved his shining silk hat once more as Leonie stepped in, and then betook himself at once to Dressel's, where he was eagerly awaited by a merry company.

"Well, where to?" Welsheim had asked as Leonie settled herself in the corner of the carriage.

"Home!"

"Home!" he called to the coachman.



### CHAPTER XIII.

LEONIE had retired at once to her own rooms after the performance. She had sat many long hours in joyless brooding, on the divan at the foot of her bed, and it was three o'clock before she finally lay down; but it was long past that hour when she was at last released from her unrefreshing, half-waking state, and fell into a deep sleep. At ten o'clock she touched the electric bell at the side of her bed. Germaine hurried in, wished her mistress "good morning," and brought her, in addition to the morning papers, a note in a well-known hand. Leonie looked at the envelope awhile, uncertain whether to open it now or after she had bathed and breakfasted. After a little reflection, she tore it open. It contained only a card, with the name "Hugo Hall," to which were added the words, "Earnestly and respectfully begs for the favour of an interview."

"An answer is awaited," observed Germaine.



"Indeed!" Leonie asked in astonishment.  
"Has the messenger been waiting long?"

"Something like an hour, madame."

"Tell him that he may return at noon."

Leonie did not know, indeed, what answer she should send to Hugo. It was painful in the extreme for her to meet him now. She knew that there would be a disagreeable, perhaps even a violent scene, and she shrank from it. But she realised at the same time that she could not deny Hugo the desired interview.

The deep depression which had dominated her yesterday, caused by the humiliation she had suffered, and which had increased during the long, solitary hours of the past night, was not dispelled by the short sleep; and, in the blind injustice of which a guilty conscience is alone capable, she was inclined to make Hugo responsible for all that she had done, and all the insults that Vallini had inflicted upon her. She scarcely gave a thought to the foolish man, who had boasted of his successes while she was longing for a comforting word. To her own dismay, she found that she must abandon all hope of an intellectual intercourse with him. He had not understood her at all when she attempted to defend herself and to put her conduct in a better light. Hugo had spoiled her. He



understood her slightest intimation, he read her thoughts in her eyes; it had even been annoying to her, the way in which he divined her most secret feelings. She knew what to expect of him, she could be angry with him—Vallini had not known what to make of her anger—and all the bitterness, all the disappointment, all the shame that she felt, combined in a feeling of rage against Hugo.

What did he want of her now? What was the purport of the interview which he demanded, and which could only be painful and exciting for both? Had she not suffered enough already? This was the way he thanked her for all she had done for him! If he had ever really loved her, he should know that he must spare her now.

She could not, would not see him. She stepped to the little desk which stood in the window corner of her bedroom, took a visiting card, and wrote under the name "Mrs. Felix Welsheim" the words, "Will be at home to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock." She put the card into a scented envelope and gave it to Germaine.

"Here is the answer which is to be called for later."

She gave a sigh of relief when she had finished the disagreeable task. Now, at least, she would have a day's freedom from him.



Why had he written her? What did he want of her?

Hugo, too, had he asked himself this question, would have been at a loss for an answer. He did not know himself what he should say to her. He only knew that he could not leave her like this; that he must at least see her and speak to her once again. Once again! Had it really come to this? He could not grasp what had happened, but he had the distinct feeling that the bond between him and Leonie was not weakened by a senseless caprice, but was really broken.

He sat in his room, in which his belongings were still standing unpacked in the corners, and waited for Leonie's answer. He waited in vain. The comfortless surroundings increased his uneasiness.

Towards eleven o'clock there was a knock at the door. Instead of the expected letter from Leonie, the maid handed him a card, and announced at the same time that a gentleman wished to see the doctor on very important business. Hugo read, "Bernhard Scherfer, theatrical manager."

"Show the gentleman in," he instructed the girl.

Soon after, a young man of some thirty-five years entered the room. He was well dressed, and had a keen look about him. He bowed with al-



most obsequious politeness, and, after he had accepted Hugo's invitation to be seated, he began a long proposition in a sonorous voice and with great facility of expression.

"I have looked for you in vain at your former lodgings. Your landlady either would not or could not give me your new address, and if we were not supplied with so good a police service I might have searched for you for some days yet. I trust I am not too late. Have you already disposed of your new play? That is to say, have you given any manager the right of producing the play in other cities?"

"A good many gentlemen have made me offers, but I have had no time as yet to consider them."

"I am glad to hear it. Then, if you will permit me, I will make you a proposition. I would like to relieve you of the cares concerning the business arrangements of the play, and I mean that in the broadest sense of the word. I have seen your play, and I foresee further success, not only here, but in Austria, in Munich, Dresden, etc., and also in the provinces. I tell you this, so that you may not confound me with those people who depreciate a good thing in order to get it cheaper. And I am not at all averse to buying your play outright.



You would transfer all rights to me—the right of representation in all countries, and at my sole expense—and I would pay you eight thousand thalers, cash down, immediately on signing the contract. I do not believe that such an offer has ever been made before to a young playwright in Germany. I may as well add that, in spite of that, I expect to make a very good thing out of it for myself; and if my expectations should be disappointed, I feel sure of making good the deficit on your next play. You would promise to intrust all your future plays to me, as I know you would be perfectly satisfied with my management.”

Hugo was completely taken by surprise by the manager's offer. Until now, his whole life had been a struggle for existence. In order to make a better outward appearance than his circumstances warranted, he had undergone the greatest privations in every other respect. The sums that he had received for his feuilletons and scientific articles had been very modest, but all that they were worth; and it was due entirely to his economical turn of mind, and his strength of will to renounce all the expensive pleasures of life, that he could keep up the appearance of being free from money troubles, before the widow as well as others. Now this man unexpectedly offered him a sum which



represented ten times the amount of his yearly income. Hitherto he had thought but vaguely of the market value of his play. The idea that it could be sold for many thousands had never occurred to him. Scherfer's offer filled his mind so completely that for the time being he entirely forgot all his troubles.

"You have spoken to me frankly," he said, when Scherfer had ended, "and that forces me to be equally frank. I will tell you plainly that I would accept your offer with pleasure, for I am inexperienced in such matters, and I should be very glad to have no further trouble with business arrangements, if you had not included any future dramatic work of mine. On that point I can make no promises, far less bind myself by a contract. I am very doubtful as to whether I shall write another play. So I can only treat with you concerning 'Hercules and Omphale.'"

Scherfer had listened to Hugo's words with a superior smile.

"Well, well," he said, in the suavest tone, "if you prefer it, we will talk only of the piece that is finished. But promise me one thing: that, in case you write a new play, you will make no definite arrangements concerning it without having first consulted me?"



"I can promise you that much with a clear conscience."

"That suits me perfectly," Scherfer broke in with a friendly smile. "And, take an old hand's word for it, you will go on writing for the stage. You will achieve other brilliant successes. In all probability you will get a set-back some time or other, and you will take a solemn vow never to write another play. But you will do it, just the same! There is one thing very queer about the stage: once you have had anything to do with it, you can't free yourself from it. And the man that has especial talent in writing for it must continue writing for it, whether he will or no. We will have another talk about it when a year is over."

"You may be mistaken, for all that!"

"I will take the risk. Are you ready, then, to sell me your play under the conditions named, without binding yourself in any way for the future?"

"Yes."

Scherfer reached out his hand to Hall.

"Then it is settled," the manager said, with a hearty shake of the hand. "Since I foresaw that our negotiations would end in this way, I took the liberty of bringing with me two copies of the contract, as I outlined it. You see it is short and simple."



He handed Hugo the document which he had taken from his breast pocket. It contained but a few lines: for the sum of eight thousand thalers, Dr. Hall transferred all rights in his play, "Hercules and Omphale," to the manager, Bernhard Scherfer. Hugo nodded assent.

"If you will sign it," Scherfer continued, "we can settle the matter at once."

With these words, he drew out his pocket-book, which contained the purchase money already counted and done up in a package. He handed Hugo the money. Hugo signed one copy of the contract, and received in return the other copy with Scherfer's signature. With another shake of the hand the business was concluded. Scherfer, after saying a few more courteous words of thanks for the prompt settling of the matter, withdrew with a satisfied smile and the same deep, respectful bow with which he had presented himself.

The whole transaction had taken less than twenty minutes, and in this short time one of the most momentous events in Hugo's existence had taken place. The glad certainty of knowing that he was free, for years to come, from the harassing question of money, was now his. This knowledge brought with it a remarkable calmness and self-



reliance. Again and again he drew the crisp notes through his fingers, and counted them over. For the first time in his life he felt the pleasure of possession. He drew a deep breath, and gazed at the fresh bills with a satisfied smile. But he had a certain feeling of shame as well, that the incident had been able to change his mood so completely even for a moment, that now a thousand vague plans, whose realisation had been made possible all at once, flashed through his head and removed him far from all the tormenting thoughts that had been torturing him so cruelly for thirty-six long hours. He secretly reproached himself that anything so trifling as money could make him forget his pain at Leonie's conduct. He also thought with sadness of poor Martha—but the knowledge of having reached at a bound the goal which until this moment had seemed so far away and unattainable, of having gained that independence for which he had always longed, of having slipped off the galling chains that had held him in Berlin for years, gave him a feeling of such intense joy that all his former troubles appeared to him in another light. Here was the opportunity of escaping from it all. He could travel, he could bury himself in any remote corner of the world, when he longed for solitude; he could go to Paris



or to London when he wished to amuse himself; he could let the strong influences of the foreign countries in the East or in the West work upon him—he was free, he was his own master. Whatever the future might bring him, he could now await it calmly.

And he smiled at himself in incredulous shame, to think that this wretched money could have worked this change.

This was his frame of mind when Leonie's answer was brought to him. It made but a slight impression upon him, it hardly surprised him; it only confirmed what he had anticipated. He glanced at the trunks and boxes that had not yet been opened, and said half aloud, "I hardly think that I will unpack them yet."

His one desire was to get away from the city which had ceased to have any attraction for him.

Leonie had dressed leisurely. The afternoon seemed an eternity to her. She longed to exert herself—to take a drive, to go calling; but each plan was given up almost as soon as it was conceived. She was nervous and uneasy. She did not want to see any one in whom she took no particular interest. And perhaps she might miss Vallini. The thought of his call was far from



pleasing to her, but she felt that she must see him, and try once more to make him think differently of her. She must do it in moral self-defence.

She walked back and forth in the bow-window room. She sat down at her desk to answer a few unimportant notes which had long been waiting a reply, but she could not settle herself even to that. She took up the latest French novel. Her eyes wandered over the pages, but she did not grasp the meaning of a single word, and she put the book down. She opened the piano. The first notes she struck grated on her ear, and she got up again. Again and again she went to the broad bow window and looked down the street. Vallini did not come. For a moment she almost regretted that she had appointed the interview with Hugo for the following day. Painful as it would be to see him at this time, he at least would not have kept her waiting.

And even if the meeting with him should be ever so stormy, any excitement was preferable to this insupportable waiting—to this torturing uncertainty.

It was a relief to her when Felix returned from the Exchange, and greeted her in his impetuous though somewhat boisterous manner. She could



not conceal from him that she was out of temper. Felix proposed every conceivable plan for her amusement, but she rejected everything, and went to her own room immediately after dinner. And a miserable evening ended the uncomfortable day.



## CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Dr. Lohausen stopped at Mrs. Breuer's at noon, feeling sure that he could give his youthful patient permission for an immediate departure, he was painfully surprised. Mrs. Breuer did not belong to that class of foolishly nervous mothers, and therefore her anxious air foreboded nothing good. The widow told the doctor that the afternoon before, shortly after he had left, the fever had returned with renewed violence, and towards evening had assumed an alarming character. It had gradually subsided, leaving Martha surprisingly strong.

"She seemed bright and well," Mrs. Breuer continued. "Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes brighter than ever, and she looked like one in perfect health. She was in good spirits, almost high spirits, gayer than I have seen her for weeks and months. We made all manner of fine plans for the future—we had settled what we should do in Italy—when all at once she became very



much agitated, apparently over nothing. I think we were speaking of whether we should buy one large trunk or two smaller ones for our journey—the tears started to her eyes. ‘We shall not need any trunk,’ she sobbed. ‘I can not travel.’ I tried to soothe her, and very thoughtlessly asked her why she could not travel. ‘Because I’m going to die,’ she answered, and burst into tears. Then that same dreadful, hacking cough came back. It seemed to tire her out completely, and at last she fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. She has been awake since ten o’clock or thereabouts. She seems to be much weaker. But you will see for yourself. I am afraid that nothing will come of our beautiful trip.”

“We will see, we will see,” the doctor answered, and entered the little room where Martha lay. Lohausen signed to the widow that he wished to be left alone with his patient.

“Well, my dear Martha,” the doctor began, as he sat down near the bed and gently took the girl’s hot, dry hand in his, “so you still have that wretched cough and fever! That was not in the contract! Yesterday you were getting on finely, and now mamma tells me— Have you been doing anything imprudent?”

“Not yesterday, but the night before.”



"In the night?" Lohausen asked, in astonishment.

Martha nodded.

"What did you do? You know that you can trust me."

"I went out secretly in the night. I was jealous—of my *fiancé*—of Dr. Hall—I followed him. Mamma does not know it. It was cold and rained very hard—I probably caught cold then."

"Child! child!" the doctor exclaimed indignantly. But he calmed himself immediately, and added in a kindly tone: "Well, that can't be undone now, so I sha'n't scold you, though you have done a pretty thing, you bad child. But I said that I wasn't going to scold you. Now, then, how do you feel?"

"The cough distresses me very much. I have such a strange feeling of tightness and oppression on my chest. My heart seems to break loose and press downward—and against my ribs—"

"H'm! h'm!—the same old pain?"

"Only more violent, doctor."

"Well, I will prescribe something soothing for you. We want to try and get rid of the fever at least; but medicine alone will not do it. The main thing lies with you. You must use all your strength of will to remain as calm as possible, to



avoid any excitement. If you are worried by any bad thoughts, call your mother, and remember that you have your best friend by you; remember that you are going to take a delightful journey, and that you must get well. You are really to be pitied," he continued playfully, as he stroked the little hand. "You must leave this cold, damp Berlin; you must go to that beautiful land 'wo die Citrone blühen,' where people are always happy, you poor child. I wish I could go with you. Now, my dear child, you must be very good and keep calm. Do you hear? And when the bad thoughts come, remember that everything will soon be all right; that in a few days you will be where there is warmth and sunshine, and the grandest scenery our dear Lord has created. And what you have told me of your mad escapade is a secret between us. I shall come again to-morrow. Good-bye, my dear Martha—good-bye, my child."

While the doctor was writing the prescription the widow looked at him anxiously. "Well, it might be better," he said. "But I hope it will turn out all right. Take her temperature this evening, and if it goes up to a hundred and four, send for me. Good-bye—it is to be hoped until to-morrow morning. Good-bye, my dear friend."

Shortly before midnight Dr. Lohausen was



again called to Martha's side. The fever had risen to a hundred and five. He remained over an hour by the sick girl. He comforted the mother, who was weeping bitterly, and yet did not betray her grief by a sound to Martha, who lay there with closed eyes and flushed cheeks, breathing heavily, and racked by a hard, dry cough.



## CHAPTER XV.

THE next day—it was a Friday—Hugo betook himself at the appointed hour to the house on the Victoria Strasse, where he had spent the happiest as well as the unhappiest hours of his life. He had a solemn foreboding that this would be the last time that he should cross the threshold. He had never paid any especial attention to the surroundings before, but now he looked closely at each step he ascended, the bell that he pulled, and the door that was opened to him; he realised that he would never see them again, that he was taking farewell of them forever.

He even looked with a certain melancholy regret at John, who told him that madame was awaiting him in the bow-window room. John, too, who had always been devoted to the doctor, seemed embarrassed and depressed as he made the announcement: the fact that he had received orders from his mistress to show Signor Vallini marked respect, and to deny her to the doctor, had been



quite sufficient to give the quick-witted servant a clear insight into the state of affairs. And he was sorry for the doctor, who had always been so kind to him.

Leonie wore a dark, sober-coloured gown, of studious simplicity. She was very pale, and appeared worn and nervous. As Hugo entered, she rose and took a few steps towards him, inclined her head a little, and put out her hand; her manner was civil but cool.

“Pardon me for not being able to receive you yesterday or the day before,” she said quietly, but in a softer voice than she was accustomed to use. “I was really ill. I am still. And, therefore, I want to beg you, above all, not to make a scene. Tell me what you have to say, quietly. I can endure anything, so long as you do not make a scene—on account of things that I can not change, that I would not change, since they are perfectly harmless. You have no idea how you injure yourself by regarding my simplest actions as wrong, because of your foolish jealousy. Be sensible! Remember what I have been to you, what I still am to you, if you will only have it so. And now tell me what you have to say!”

“What you still are to me?” Hugo repeated. “Do you really mean that? Then how shall I



reconcile all that which has happened in these two interminable days, with what you were to me?"

"Why, what has happened?" asked Leonie, ready for the fray.

"Well, why did you refuse to see me yesterday?"

"Because I was ill! I have already told you that!"

"But yet, not ill enough to show the other man the door."

"I do not understand you. What other man?"

"Vallini, if you will insist upon hearing the name!"

"I did not receive him!" Leonie retorted defiantly.

"I saw him leave the house."

"Did you see him here—here, inside the house, where I received him? Ah! so you doubt my word? Then question the servants—it would hardly astonish me!"

"Then you wish to make me believe—"

"Not the slightest thing, my dear Hugo!" Leonie interrupted, with cutting coolness. "Believe anything you please. Torment yourself all you like, but don't torment me, I earnestly request you—I do not need to justify myself before you, and I will not do it."



“Then explain one thing to me: did you not realise how deeply it would hurt me to see you together at the theatre, where I could not escape seeing you? You might have spared me that!”

“I am not at all to blame for that. The gentlemen insisted upon going again, and all that I could say against it had no effect. Pray do not smile in that sceptical way! It is true! It is in such trivial matters as these that I have to respect my husband’s wishes in order to—to make amends for other things. I am very sorry to have to speak so plainly to you. But you are always insulting me by your suspicions! You never think of the duties which my life, as it now is, imposes upon me! You injure yourself more than you suspect, by such foolishness and injustice. You tyrannise over me, you torment me without the slightest cause. Do you think a woman exists who would endure such treatment long? I have some independence, and I am accustomed to be treated with respect. You love me, you love me—you tell me so, and I am ready to believe you. But when you have said that, you think that all is said! You torment me to death, and your only excuse is, you love me! No, my dear Hugo, that is not true love! True love suffereth long and is kind; true love envieth



not, doth not behave itself unseemly, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things!—When I think of these glorious words of the apostle, I really have to doubt whether you have ever loved me truly.”

“Do you doubt it? Then listen to me. You have been my all, the air that I breathe, the sun that gives me light and warmth; and since I feared that I had lost you, I have wandered through darkness and night like a lost soul! No, this existence is worse than death! You shall not turn away from me—you shall not!” Hugo broke forth in dull despair. He pressed his hands to his temples and groaned.

When Leonie saw this strong man completely broken down before her, she was stirred by a feeling of pity. She longed to put her arms around his neck and whisper to him with a passionate kiss: “Forgive me, I am myself again, and I give myself to you anew. Let us strike these last frightful days from our lives, blot out all memory of them; let us think only of how happy we have been, and earnestly strive to be happy again.” But the thought of the other she could not banish from her mind forced itself between her and the man before her. She sighed, and said with real compassion, “Be reasonable, my dear Hugo.”



He looked up at her questioningly ; she could not meet his gaze—her eyes fell.

“ It lies with you,” Hugo answered after a short pause, “ to make me as reasonable as you could wish. Be again what you were to me—what you no longer are to me, Leonie ! My feelings do not deceive me. Have the courage to rouse yourself from the delirium that has seized you ! Do not misunderstand me,” he went on more eagerly, as he saw that Leonie was biting her lip ; “ I do not want to reproach you ! I only want to lead you back to the recognition of yourself. And I will show you that it is not even necessary to understand everything in order to pardon everything. I will pardon what I do not understand. Never shall a word or look remind you of it. I will blot it out from my memory. I will convince myself that I have been fooled by a treacherous dream, and I will love you as passionately, as truly, as tenderly as I ever have. I will indeed. And now tell me, Leonie, do you still doubt me ? ”

She was now looking at him sharply, with wide-open eyes. She was amazed at the way in which Hugo had read her secret emotions, had divined her unspoken words, and had answered them as she had expected he would. Yes, he understood her. And she would really leave him, could leave him for



that other ! It seemed incomprehensible ! But he would even forgive her what he could not comprehend. He loved her truly, and his love suffered long, and was kind—endured all things, hoped all things.

She felt abashed and grateful ; she longed to reach him her hand in reconciliation. A certain embarrassment made her hesitate. She would wait until Hugo, who surely knew what change was going on within her, should take her hand. How she longed to give it to him, to passionately return the pressure of his hand, and to seal the bond anew in a tender embrace ! A glad smile parted Hugo's lips, and, as she had hoped, and as she had known it would, his right hand stretched out in search of her.

At that moment John, discreet and expressionless as ever, entered the room and handed his mistress a card ; then he withdrew and stood at the door awaiting his instructions.

Leonie turned pale. Hugo had immediately conjectured who the intruder was. But there was no need of conjectures. A hasty glance at the absurdly large visiting card sufficed for him to read the name " Ernst Vallini " conspicuously engraved in heavy Gothic letters.

Hugo bent down to Leonie and said in an im-



ploring whisper, "I entreat you not to receive him!"

Leonie shrugged her shoulders, glanced quickly at John who was staring vacantly before him, then gave Hugo an indignant look, and said softly but emphatically: "You are not very judicious!—Show him in!" she added aloud in an indifferent tone turning towards John.

John made a hardly perceptible bow and vanished.

"Why! where are you going?" she asked Hugo, who had taken up his hat and approached her.

"I am going—where, I do not know!"

"You cannot go! Wait ten minutes longer! How would it look if you ran away now?"

"Let me go! I beg you! It will be much better to," Hugo said between his teeth.

"You shall not compromise me."

"Because I will not compromise you, let me go! I do not know whether I can control myself."

"Remain here!" Leonie commanded.

"At your own peril!" Hugo retorted, his nostrils quivering.

At this moment Vallini entered, a rose in his button-hole, a smile on his face, careless and self-satisfied as ever. He bowed before Leonie, kissed



her hand, and after exchanging a slight greeting with Hall, said, "I hope my gracious and lovely patroness will not be vexed with me that yesterday—"

"Your instinct told you rightly," Leonie interrupted. "I could not have received you yesterday. I was ill."

"A—h!" cried Vallini with painful solicitude, as though the news affected him deeply. "You were suffering?"

"Only a little indisposed. It was of no consequence."

"And to-day?"

"Thank you! I feel perfectly well, and in good humour besides! My good friends see to it that I don't get low-spirited," she added smilingly, in the attempt to draw Hugo into the conversation, for he was sitting to one side, staring moodily at the carpet.

"Yes, yes!" Vallini added absently, merely to fill up the pause. Hugo remained motionless and silent, and continued staring at the bright pattern at his feet, and apparently paying no attention to the two or to what they were saying. He did not notice how Vallini gave him a cursory smile, and then turned to Leonie with a meaning look.

Leonie did not easily lose her self-possession,



but now she felt embarrassed, and in the threatening atmosphere which oppressed her she could not think of the simplest topic of conversation. There came a pause. She heard the low ticking of the little clock on her desk.

"I am almost forced to think," Vallini began after a period of uncomfortable silence, "that I have interrupted an interesting conversation here."

"Most certainly not!" Leonie answered in a sprightly tone. "Are you surprised at the doctor's silence? Ah! these authors must be judged by a different standard from ordinary mortals!—You see, my dear doctor," she continued, turning towards Hugo, "what misconceptions genius is open to. Your absorption had led Signor Vallini to believe that he is intruding upon us!"

"Indeed!" drawled Hugo. "No one has the right of deciding the question as to whether any one is intruding here but you, the hostess."

"That certainly does not sound very reassuring!" Vallini answered, with a malicious smile, "But your decision, my dear madame, satisfies me perfectly, and I can only agree with you in your opinion that authors form a class by themselves—the same as we singers."

Hugo now raised his head and measured Vallini from head to foot.



"I have never laid any claims to distinction," he answered coldly, although he was boiling within, "and I ask no man to make excuses for me on account of my profession."

The smile had vanished from Vallini's red lips.

"But we are very glad to make them for you," interrupted Leonie, who was endeavouring to avert the approaching storm. "But let us change the subject!—And is it true," turning to Vallini with well-feigned vivacity, "what appeared in the papers this morning, that you will open the winter season as 'Arnold' in 'William Tell'? I cannot say with what pleasure I am looking forward to it. The *rôle* is exactly suited to you and your glorious voice."

"No, I sha'n't be so bad as 'Arnold,' so people say. At any rate, I had a success in that *rôle* this last season, at St. Petersburg—it was simply stupendous! I interpret the *rôle* very differently from any one else. For me 'Arnold' is the patriot, the son, the lover. Thus I try to represent him in my acting and singing," he added with importance.

"That is undoubtedly the only correct interpretation," Leonie affirmed courteously. It was very painful to her that Vallini should talk so foolishly, before Hugo of all others. She was almost ashamed, and let her eyes fall as Hugo looked



across at her sarcastically. This silent dialogue had not escaped Vallini, and he partially understood its meaning, for he was comparatively quick-witted when his vanity came in question.

"Yet, it seems to me," he said with affected *hauteur*, "as though every one were not convinced of the correctness of my interpretation. But my ambition does not go so far as to satisfy every one."

He evidently prided himself on this sentence.

Hugo leaned back and beat a measured tattoo on the arms of his chair, as he answered lazily: "If you are alluding to me, I can reassure you. Your interpretation of 'Arnold' seems to me as original as it is irreproachable. If kind Providence had gifted me with a fine voice, I should also have represented *Il Trovatore* as the lover of his lady-love and the son of his mother. Perhaps it is not a remarkably original conception, but still every one would not have thought of it."

It took Vallini some moments to grasp the fact that Hall was making sport of him, but when he did he was furious beyond words, and wholly disconcerted for the moment. Since he had been at the height of his fame, now more than three years, he had been accustomed to be treated as the honoured and idolised artist at the theatre, and as the



pampered and privileged favourite in the drawing-room. Whenever he had had a disagreeable discussion behind the scenes with any injured fellow-artist, he had quickly ended the affair and crushed his weaker opponent by some insolent speech, secure in his position and his own indispensability. Now should he, whom royalty had seen fit to honour, allow himself to be ridiculed by this writer, whose very name he had never heard until a week before—allow himself to be ridiculed before this woman, in whose presence he would not appear ridiculous for anything in the world? As he realised the situation, he knew how to explain the cause of Hugo's conduct; it was the jealousy of the injured, the discarded lover, which was endeavouring to avenge itself on him, the fortunate rival. Now he knew the weapons of defence.

"I addressed my remarks exclusively to Mrs. Welsheim at first," he said with a forced smile, "and that evidently did not please you."

Hugo started up.

"I must request you to leave Mrs. Welsheim out of the question," he said in a suppressed tone, but with sharp emphasis.

"But, gentlemen!" Leonie interrupted, "I do not understand—"

"Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Welsheim," cried



Vallini, who wholly misunderstood Hugo's action and considered it a retreat. "I cannot allow this gentleman to say in your presence—"

"We can postpone the conversation to any other place and to any time it pleases you," Hugo interrupted.

"I most certainly should have requested you to do so," answered Vallini, trembling with excitement.

"It would give me great pleasure," Hugo said, "to comply with your wish immediately."

"And I forbid you to do it!" cried Leonie, raising her voice—"both of you! It is simply preposterous. Do you not see to what a *rôle* you condemn me in your foolish comedy? Am I not particularly exposed to the most insulting calumnies on account of my open friendliness towards people who are congenial to me? Will you open the door to scandal, by a foolish quarrel that no one can explain? You understand me! I forbid it!"

This prohibition came at an opportune moment for Vallini. He already regretted having gone so far, when he noticed how Hugo took him at his word.

"You are right, my dear Mrs. Welsheim," he said in a dignified manner, while he buttoned his



double-breasted coat tightly across his chest. "Forgive me for allowing myself to be carried away so far. You demand a sacrifice of me which Heaven knows is not easy for me to make. But I know what my duty is as a gentleman, and out of regard for you—wholly out of regard for you—" He emphasized this repetition very strongly, and threw a threatening glance at Hugo, which was intended less for him than for Leonie.

"Oh!" interrupted Hugo. "If you are in earnest, we can soon find ways and means of putting Mrs. Welsheim's name entirely out of the affair."

"I forbid it!" Leonie repeated with flashing eyes and in a high, shrill voice. "Did you not understand me? Will you not understand me?" She was trembling with anger. "I'm done with you!" she gasped, and then turning to the singer, she added in a louder tone: "But you, my dear Signor Vallini—you understand in what an intolerable situation a scandal would place me. I turn to you in entreaty. Give me your word that you will not accept any challenge from this gentleman, either here or anywhere else, or under any pretext whatever? I will esteem you so much the more, and I shall know where true chivalry is to be found! Give me your word!"

Vallini made a pause—for effect. Leonie's re-



quest coincided perfectly with his own desires, but he considered it proper to portray a severe internal struggle, the noble and chivalrous triumphing in the end. His forehead was drawn up into deep wrinkles, his mouth compressed, and he gazed gloomily and menacingly before him. Then he looked at Leonie. His forehead smoothed, his eyes brightened, his lips parted in a gracious smile, showing the gleaming white teeth. At first hesitatingly, then with resolute decision, he stretched out his right hand to Leonie, and drawing a deep breath he exclaimed: "I give you my word. Here is my hand!"

Leonie placed her hand in his, and thanked him with a fervent look.

Here was a good opportunity for him to make his escape, and the singer lost no time in seizing it.

"You will pardon me if I tear myself away now," he said, taking up his hat. "I have fulfilled the purpose of my call to-day, which was to excuse my non-appearance yesterday, and to make inquiries after your health: I have still some important affairs to attend to. With your kind permission I shall try to atone for this short call as soon as possible."

"You are heartily welcome at any time! Good-bye then for the present," Leonie answered in the



most cordial, friendly way, and gave him her hand to kiss. He looked over to where Hugo stood. Hugo answered the look, which was intended for a salute, in the same manner. Leonie accompanied him to the door, and smiled after him till it closed behind him.

Without retracing her steps she turned around. Her glance fell upon Hugo, and instantly an almost appalling change took place in her. The artificial smile gave way to a look of unconcealed anger, of the most violent rage. She had grown white. There was something terrible in the pallid hue of the face, with the greenish shadows under the blazing eyes. Her lips trembled. A swollen bluish vein disfigured the beautiful neck. Everything charming, everything feminine, had vanished, as at the touch of a magician's wand. It was a furious, unlovely woman, a stranger, whom Hugo saw before him with uneasy astonishment. She was incapable even of a word—her fury strangled her. She pressed her trembling lips close together, her nostrils dilated and contracted, and she nodded her head several times in a horribly automatic manner.

Finally, she went up close to Hugo and panted, while her breast rose and fell in violent agitation. "You have done a pretty thing! I thank you!—



For shame!" she burst out, with an expression of utter contempt on her face. And as Hugo seemed about to make some reply, she cried in a hoarse, shrill voice: "Yes, for shame! Bah!—You humiliate me before that man, force me to beg a favour of him to-day, to show myself grateful to him to-morrow, to propitiate him at all times, from fear that he will tattle as you have tattled. To that man, whom nothing can induce to hold his tongue, you say as plainly as words can tell, 'I am this woman's lover, and I quarrel with you because I am jealous of you.' This is the way you thank me for all I have done for you! For shame! Do not try to vindicate yourself! You cannot. Treachery towards the woman once loved is the basest crime a man can commit! A thief, a murderer, stands higher, in my opinion, than a lover who proclaims his secret, her secret, from the house-tops! And that is what you have done! You—you, to whom I have given everything!"

"In order to take everything away from me in a brutal caprice!" Hugo now interrupted. Leonie's invectives had made absolutely no impression upon him. He had listened to her as though he were an uninterested person—as though she had nothing to do with him. This



shrill-voiced woman was a stranger to him. He had never heard this voice, never seen this Megara-like face. Gradually things grew clear to him. Had he really loved this raging fury—but a moment before? Could this be his Leonie, whom he had always worshipped and looked up to? With whom he had wandered happily through the forests on the Wann See, planning and composing? He felt as though he had been violently seized by rough hands and shaken from a sweet, deluding dream to hateful reality.

This then was the true Leonie who now stood shrieking before him in her unconcealed unloveliness; whom fury had stripped of all the glamour of womanly charm and tenderness. The Leonie whom he had loved so truly, so fervently, so passionately until this moment, was a creation of his own, which the harsh breath of reality had destroyed.

“You have given me everything, and you have taken everything from me!” continued Hugo, who had finally collected himself—“taken without reason—just because it pleased you. And you have taken more from me, much more, than you could ever give me! And when you torture me to the verge of madness you wonder that I lose my senses, and so far forget myself as to



vent my anger on a miserable creature like this Vallini. It is not that which has compromised you! Make your mind easy on that score! You and you alone have compromised yourself! It is not the blustering, jealous fool that speaks in me, it is one who speaks from knowledge! And if you should swear by all that you hold sacred to the contrary, I would not believe you! You are Vallini's mistress, or, if you are not as yet, you will be! And that is your destruction! I admit that Vallini is a much more comfortable person than I am. He does not take you so seriously. He will never allow himself to be carried away by any passionate imprudence. For him, you are nothing more than another feather in his cap! He has destroyed you, the knave! He drags you from the noble down to the low, from that love which, if culpable according to our institutions, always has something noble in it, down to the sensual, which is always vulgar; he makes a wanton of the woman he loves! You throw me aside! It is well! For in this last hour it has become a horrible certainty to me that from now on there can be nothing in common between us! It is not necessary for you to drive me away! Of my own free will you shall never see me again! You need not trouble yourself about what will become of



me. And I do not know myself. But what will become of you, if you do not rouse yourself with a moral effort, of which I do not hold you capable any longer—what will become of you, Vallini's mistress? I will tell you: 'You begin with one in secret!' You understand me!"

Leonie gasped and trembled as she listened to him, her face distorted in a dreadful smile. Her glance wandered over the room and rested on the door. As she was about to open her lips, Hugo seized his hat, and saying, "And I understand you also!" hastily left the room, without a word of farewell, without once turning around.

While John was helping him into his overcoat, that keen-eyed servant whispered dejectedly, "What is to be done with the bronze which my master intends for the doctor?"

"You will receive orders later," answered Hugo, and went out into the hall. He was very much excited. The fresh air of the Thiergarten did him good. He sat down on a bench beside a nurse, and smilingly watched a chubby, red-cheeked infant, who was sleeping in her arms. The nurse seemed flattered by the attention paid to her charge, and held the child so that the strange gentleman could see it better.



## CHAPTER XVI.

HE must leave Berlin; go to some place where nothing would remind him of these last days. He knew that here he would never escape from the frightful impression this woman, whom he had once loved, had made upon him. Any chance meeting with her or with Vallini, who was to be seen everywhere, would bring the whole terrible scene before him again. Therefore he must leave Berlin!

There was nothing to keep him here any longer. Everything that he had prized before now filled him with disgust. Involuntarily he put his hand to his breast-pocket. He was rich! It was strange that he could have forgotten that for a moment! that he could think of nothing but of Leonie; could see nothing before him but that suddenly distorted face and those small, flashing eyes that all at once had looked at him so unlovingly, so angrily, so spitefully; could hear nothing but that hoarse, piercing voice. Why should he not leave Berlin — for the south, for which he longed so



ardently just now as he sat watching the fiery brilliancy of the setting sun?

The south! How much good it would do her, poor, sick Martha, to whom the rough breath of the north was so fatal! She had so often spoken of a journey to Italy as a beautiful dream of the future, scarcely to be realised! And now he could have made this dream a reality, could have redeemed the promises which had won him the loving tenderness, the touching surrender of the confiding girl; he could have roamed over the mild shores of Lake Geneva, or over sunny upper Italy, or the Riviera, with his young wife, awakened to new life by the healing power of happiness—if he had not deceived and deluded her—for Leonie!

And beside the ghastly, distorted face of the enraged woman there now arose the picture of the noble girl with gentle blue eyes, whom he once thought he loved, and whom he had so deeply injured, and by the side of the fierce, unnatural Leonie, the patient, uncomplaining Martha, in her maidenly modesty and chaste purity, appeared to him like a glorified saint. While Leonie's face rose before him out of the darkness of night, Martha's pathetic features appeared against a shimmering background of gold, and a radiant halo seemed to play about the wonderful mass of golden



hair. The echo of the shrill voice, that had gone through and through him, still rang in his ears. But Martha was silent. She had never spoken much. She had parted from him without a word of reproach. But, in the glance which he felt turned upon him, lay a terrible, secret accusation.

He could not leave her in this way! He must see her once more, must pray for her forgiveness, and even if she could not forgive him, it would at least be a consolation to know that she realised the genuineness of his repentance, and knew of the just and terrible retribution which had fallen upon him. He must see her once more!—only once more!—that was all that kept him here; his belongings were packed, any trivial matters that still needed attention he could settle in an hour, and that very night he could be rolling towards the south.

Once more he stood before the old house in the Brüder Strasse. His heart was beating violently. He looked about him timidly to see if any one were watching him, as though he were about to commit some crime. No one saw him. The driver of the carriage that stood before the door had fallen asleep. He stole up the narrow, well-known stairs like a thief who feared to be detected in the act. He remained standing irresolutely be-



fore the glass door with its cheap curtains. He heard sounds on the other side. He held his breath and listened. They were voices, carrying on a conversation in a subdued tone—one a woman's, the other a man's.

Hugo knocked on the pane, at first softly, then more loudly. The door was cautiously opened.

"For God's sake!" exclaimed the widow in a loud voice. She had forgotten herself for a moment, when she unexpectedly saw Hugo before her—the expression of surprise on her severe face soon gave place to the direst dismay.

"What do you want here?"

"I must see her."

"Softly, I implore you!"

"Only let me see her once—once for the last time! I will leave Berlin to-day, and nothing shall recall me to your mind if you desire it. But what has happened?" he continued, in deadly anxiety, as he caught sight of Dr. Lohausen's grave face. Is Martha seriously ill?"

"Come in, first of all," said the doctor in a low voice; "we cannot settle it here on the threshold!"

He had opened the door of the front room, while the widow closed the hall door with anxious care. The three noiselessly entered the room in which Hugo had lived so many years. How cold



and bare it seemed to him now—without his books, without his writing materials, without any of the trifles which had filled it, warmed it, and given it individual life!

As softly as they tiptoed past the sitting-room where Martha had been since the day before, nothing had escaped the sick girl, whose senses were rendered particularly keen by her feverish, excited state. She thought she heard Hugo's voice, and she was not surprised at it. She had counted with absolute certainty upon his coming. With a great effort she raised herself a little in bed and listened, her head bent forward, and supporting herself on her elbows. At first she heard an inarticulate murmur, then the creaking of Hugo's door—then all was still. But she still listened with strained attention, although she could hear nothing but the wheezing, rattling sound of her own laboured breathing.

"My poor young friend!" said Lohausen, sympathetically, "I understand your desire, I know how anxious you are, and I would gladly help you. I should also earnestly advise Mrs. Breuer to overlook everything—if it were otherwise; but—now it will not do."

"Doctor!" cried Hugo with deep emotion.

"Yes, I am very sorry for you," answered the doctor earnestly. "But it simply won't do. It is



not a question of a deserted girl or of a repentant sinner, it is simply the question of a very sick girl to whom any excitement might be fatal. So be reasonable ! There is no use. I must refuse you. It is my duty ! Come, I will drive you anywhere you wish. When Martha is better, you shall know it immediately ; and then—we shall see, we shall see. But now, come ! ”

The doctor had laid his hand on Hugo's shoulder, and was leading the unnerved man to the door, when the sharp, impatient ringing of a small bell sounded from the sitting-room. The widow paled, and even the doctor stopped in surprise.

“ Hallo ! ” he muttered to himself, “ what does that mean ? ”

“ Won't they ever stop talking ! ” Martha had thought, as she lay supporting herself with the greatest difficulty on her elbows, half lying, half sitting in bed, and finally shaking her head impatiently.

She wanted to be sure. She became more and more agitated and uneasy. There was a terrible weight on her breast ; each gasping, rattling breath that she drew was pain to her, and, in addition, there was that unbearable tickling in the throat which at short intervals brought forth a hard, dry cough.



And they were talking away in there; and no one troubled himself about her! They ought not to leave her alone! They ought to come to her—mamma and the doctor—all of them! Even her lover, who had been untrue to her!

She felt the strength leaving her, and knew that she would fall back on the pillows the next moment. She gathered herself together once more, seized the bell which stood near her, and rang it with angry and impatient energy.

The alarmed mother and the doctor appeared immediately in the doorway.

“What is the matter, my child?” asked the widow, who had rapidly stepped to the bed.

“You should not leave me alone for hours at a time!” gasped Martha indignantly, and almost in tears.

“Why, scarcely five minutes have passed, dear heart,” said her mother, trying to soothe her.

“And you ought not to keep him from me! I want to see him!”

“My dear Martha,” now broke in the doctor, “you know you promised me to be good and to keep quiet.”

“Oh, leave me alone!” burst out Martha. “Always keep quiet! And always keep quiet!”



It is all very well for you to talk ! I can't keep quiet. I am burning here !” She placed her hand on her labouring breast, and a violent paroxysm of coughing interrupted her words.

“I implore you, child, control yourself ! lie quite still for just a few moments. Please do, my dear, good child !”

“I can't !” gasped Martha, raising herself again by exerting all her strength. “I can't bear it.” The doctor supported her. “Ah !” she sighed, somewhat relieved, “thank you, doctor !” She raised her thin, transparent hand again to her breast. “I don't know what is the matter with me, I have such a warm feeling here !” Then with another burst of impatience she cried in a clearer tone : “I will see him ! If you don't want to torment me, call him ; or I will jump out of bed and go to him myself !—I mean it !” And still clearer, still louder, she called : “Hugo !” Then she sank back on the bed and whispered almost inaudibly, “How it burns !”

The door had opened softly, and Hugo's blanched face appeared. He looked at the mother in questioning entreaty. The widow and the doctor had exchanged a rapid glance. Lohausen shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say : “It cannot excite her more than she is now, the meeting can



scarcely harm her, she demands it, what is the use of denying her?"

The widow nodded to Hugo to enter. He carefully closed the door. Martha did not hear him; her cough was louder and more violent. She now felt in her mouth, when she coughed, that peculiar warmth that was creeping up within her. With closed eyes she felt for her handkerchief and raised it to her lips. When she took it away in her clenched hand it was flecked with bright-red spots.

In visible consternation Lohausen bent over the hand which clenched the handkerchief and examined the sinister spots. Then he turned to Hugo with a meaning look, giving him to understand that he must leave the room as soon as possible.

Hugo restrained his feelings, and was about to obey the doctor's orders, when Martha opened her eyes.

She smiled when she saw Hugo, and slowly lowered her lids in greeting. Hugo remained standing irresolute.

"I knew that you would come," she said softly. "I knew you at once, by your voice!—See, doctor, now I am quiet—and quite good."

She smiled again and looked tenderly at Hugo,



then she raised her hand a little to give it to her lover. The blood-stained handkerchief lay on the bed.

Hugo had silently sunk on his knees beside the bed; and although a sharp pain was cutting him to the heart, he made an effort to smile, and lifted her small, hot hand to his burning lips.

“Can you forgive me, Martha?” he asked remorsefully.

“With my whole heart,” she answered softly but distinctly.

“I will atone for everything!” said Hugo in a low voice, and covering the small hand with fervent kisses. “And now you may trust me, dear Martha. I shall never leave you again! And when you get well, we will go together—”

He broke off suddenly. Martha had wrenched her hand away from him with a surprising strength, and suddenly raised herself upright in bed. A violent paroxysm of coughing racked the slight frame, while the doctor, who had sprung to the bedside, supported the struggling girl. She tried to speak, but was prevented by the terrible, continuous cough; she pointed to her left side, and moved her hand several times from her heart to her throat. The drops stood out on her forehead. A dreadful light came into the distended eyes, and



suddenly a bright stream of blood burst from her mouth and she fell back exhausted on the pillows.

Fear and horror had seized the three who stood by the bed.

The doctor rubbed the sick girl's forehead and temples with cologne, and this seemed to afford her a moment's relief. He gave her water mixed with vinegar, which the mother had brought at his order. Martha drank it eagerly, and gave him a grateful nod. Lohausen put his ear to her chest, and the muttering, gurgling sound he heard confirmed his worst suspicions.

After a few moments Martha grew restless again, her feeble motions betrayed her uneasiness, and her forehead was contracted in a frown. She struck the coverlid several times with her hand.

"It is so warm," she said, "so horribly w—!" She could not finish the word, for a second and still more violent hæmorrhage followed.

Then she smiled once more and closed her eyes. In a moment she opened them again and looked up gratefully at the doctor, who was bending over her. She turned to her mother with a look of infinite love and tenderness. Then she looked for Hugo. He stood directly before her. How was it that she had not seen him! It had become so strangely dark around her all at once!



But she could still recognise him in the darkness, could smile at him, could return the soft pressure of the hand that held hers so gently.

“Together!” came like a sigh from her lips. She lingered over the last word that Hugo had spoken to her.

It grew still darker around her. The blackest night seemed to have fallen, and still it could not be so late. She closed her eyes—she was so very tired.

Her face had taken on a bluish tinge. She now lay there motionless. Once only she made a hasty movement with her arms, as though she were struggling for air. But this agony lasted but a moment. Her peaceful, almost smiling expression proclaimed perfect freedom from pain. Once again the beautiful blue eyes opened. Now all was bright and sunny again, though only for a moment. But that was long enough for her to smile tenderly once more at the loved ones who stood near her. Now she closed her eyes, happy and content, her head sank back among the pillows, and she gave a soft, lingering sigh.

Her struggle was ended, she had died in peace.

The western sky flamed deep red in the light of the dying October sun, and the dull, golden reflection fell through the window upon Martha's



bed, and covered the outstretched form in a wonderful radiance.

As the evening glow faded, a look of horror crept over Hugo's pallid face and the drawn features of the mother, who had resumed her stern, rigid air. The doctor had just parted from them with tears in his eyes, leaving them standing hand in hand by the bed.

But the expression on the pale face was so blissful, so peaceful, so perfectly resigned, that the two who stood with clasped hands by the body soon overcame the feeling of horror, and looked with deep grief and gentle sadness at the transfigured face of the sleeping girl.



## CHAPTER XVII.

ON the following Tuesday, about eleven o'clock, Welsheim stepped into the small room where Leonie was in the habit of breakfasting, to take leave of her before going to his office. He found her as usual in a light morning gown, drinking her chocolate, and lost in the perusal of theatrical notices and society announcements.

"What in the deuce does this mean?" he exclaimed, in his noisy way, which Leonie had given up trying to subdue. "This Lohausen sends back the money—with a few trifling words of thanks—no more need for it. You know: the money that I gave him to send the little one to Italy. Well, I haven't any feeling about it—but I don't understand it! Do you?"

He handed his wife Lohausen's note and the bills.

"I don't want to enrich myself!" he added jovially. "Get yourself something pretty with it!"



"Thank you!" answered Leonie gravely, without taking the tendered notes. "I don't care to!"

Here was another surprise!

Welsheim let himself drop on the low settee beside his wife. Without a word she handed him the paper which she had just been reading, and pointed to a black-bordered notice.

"Ah, indeed!" said Welsheim, when he had read it. He, too, had become grave.

"So we came too late," he continued, after a lengthy pause. "I am very sorry! She was really a very pretty girl! Well, we are all mortal, are we not? But I am sorry! And Hugo—Dr. Hall," he corrected himself, "I am also very sorry for him, although he does not deserve it from us!—but that is the way with me! I can't bear malice! And even if he has been rude to you, still I'm sorry for him! God knows I'm sorry for him! I should not care to be in his shoes!"

Meanwhile he had thrust the bank-notes into his pocket-book, and carefully creased Lohausen's letter with his thumb-nail.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Felix. "You don't say a word! People generally say something in such cases."

"But I have nothing to say," answered Leonie



slowly. "It is always very sad"—she sipped her chocolate—"when a poor young girl dies!"

"That is what I think! Very sad!"

"That is the only thing that affects me. As far as Dr. Hall is concerned, I have already requested you, and for very good reasons as you should know, to drop his name from our conversation, as I have been obliged to drop its bearer from our acquaintance."

"Yes, yes; quite right! I only meant—"

"And this request," continued Leonie in the same tone, without paying any attention to Welsheim's remark, "is perfectly justifiable. Do not force me to repeat it, do not force me to give a still stronger reason by laying bare the whole truth. You are always so quick to understand! What I have said to you should suffice!"

"Perfectly, perfectly, my dear Leonie!" exclaimed Felix, with a comical gesture of self-defence. "I never want to hear anything more of the matter! I have already heard more than I care to! It is scandalous that he should have thanked us so for all our kindness! Who would have thought it of the doctor? Disrespectful to you! It is incredible. He ought to have known you better! His success must have gone to his head! It is unheard of! When I meet him he



shall be nothing but air to me, nothing more! I don't know him any longer! I know what I owe to you, to myself, and to the honour of my house! Air! Nothing more! But still I'm sorry for him. That is the way with me— Good Lord! it's a quarter of twelve!— My time is up! Good-bye!”

He kissed Leonie's forehead and went hastily towards the door; then he suddenly stopped. “Shall we send the widow a wreath?”

Leonie looked up impatiently.

“Just as you please,” continued Welsheim, who had already put on his hat; “I only thought—the young girl was with us once—do you remember? at the Reichshalle? And I thought—but if you think differently—I agree with you— The poor young thing! And the poor mother— Ah! well, then, good-bye! My time is up!”

Leonie slowly finished her chocolate, and resumed her interrupted reading of the morning paper, as usual.

At the same moment a simple coffin was being lowered into the ground. Three mourners only stood around the grave. But these three sorrowed truly.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

1891.

IN the first half of the year 1891 I took a zig-zag journey through the United States—from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the borders of Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

I accepted the invitation of my friend Mr. Henry Villard, the President of the Northern Pacific Railroad. My American host placed a private car at our disposal during the whole of our journey—a regular hotel on wheels, with drawing-room, dining-room, sleeping-rooms, kitchen, etc.—and which bore us safely for five months from North to South, and from East to West. We soon fled from the snow and cold of New York, and, although it was early in February, found sunny skies and warm summer days in Florida. On the way from St. Augustine to New Orleans our car met with a trifling accident, which we should never have noticed had not the conductor of the train to which we were attached declared, with that



stony decision in the face of which all opposition must give way, that he could not allow our car to go on in this damaged condition, but must detach us at the next station and have us side-tracked. He would send some men from the first large station to repair the damage, and I could continue my journey to New Orleans the next day on the same train, with a loss of twenty-four hours. "Good-bye, sir."

And so it came to pass.

Cypress was the name of the station, and I am in doubt to this day as to its purpose and end. For nowhere were to be seen either towns or villages, hamlets, or even isolated farms; outside of a few wretched negro huts, which lay at considerable distances from each other, and seemed for the most part deserted, I had seen no trace for hours of any human habitation, with the exception of the railroad station.

The scenery in the north of Florida traversed by the railroad impressed me by its sublime ugliness and inhospitality. Nothing but stumps, with yellowish, muddy water, out of which grew yellow or dull-green vegetation; the woods in dreadful condition, for the most part sickly firs and pines rising out of impenetrable masses of stunted underbrush, and everything as far as the eye could



reach destroyed by the ruthless forest incendiaries. Charred trunks, standing or fallen, the smoke-blackened limbs robbed of all adornment, stretching out like stiffened bones—tree corpses everywhere, yellow ground, morass, weeds, and foul-smelling water.

This was the country through which we had been travelling for many long hours. And the place christened Cypress differed in no way from its melancholy surroundings. Here we were forced to spend twenty-four hours against our will—and it was yet early. It was something like ten in the morning when we were made stationary at Cypress.

While my children were playing in the plank shed which did duty as a station, I had been taking a little survey, without the slightest result. I could not distinguish a single hut, no living being, not even the trace of a road. For a whole hour I wandered in the wilderness under the charred boughs, often sinking to my ankles in the yielding, swampy ground. There was nothing left for me to do but to return to the car and to change my soaked shoes. Then I tried to settle down to work, although I had little desire for it, for the weather was wonderful, warm without being hot, and under the immeasurably high arch of the deep blue heavens sailed the powerful hawks in stately



flight, without a motion of the wings, now rising, now falling. And it happened as I had foreseen. When I had changed my shoes, and had seated myself at the desk, the close, heavy air of the car became insupportable, and I climbed down to set out on another exploring expedition.

Before the railway shed stood the station-master, a young man of some five and twenty years, of fair complexion, gaunt, with prominent cheek-bones and a powerful chin. He seemed to be taking a lively interest in my children's uproarious play. I approached him and began, by way of conversation :

"It does not seem to be overwhelmingly gay here in Cypress. Are you all alone here?"

"There's a few gentlemen here who works on the road—not many. And farther west, to Mariana, there's a few colored gentlemen. Tallahassee ain't far off, and Tallahassee's something of a place—just booming."

"But are you all alone here in Cypress with your companions who work on the road?"

"Just about. Some two miles from here, northwest, there's a log hut in the woods. 'The German' lives there."

"The German?" I repeated in surprise. "How does he come here?"



"Can't tell you. He's been a long time in the country, and is the first settler hereabouts. It's some twenty years since he built his hut here. Don't even know his name. The man who was here before me called him the German, and so we call him that too."

"And what does he do in this wilderness?"

"Shoots alligators."

"But one can't live on alligators."

"Well, he has all he needs. I just told you he came to the country a long while ago. He bought land in Jacksonville at the right time, and sold out at a big profit. He has a pile in the bank at Jacksonville. All he needs, and more, too."

This mysterious man interested me. Now I had an aim for my expedition.

"Where is the German to be found?" I asked.

"You can't go wrong. Do you see there—where the forest fire ends and the thick cypress wood begins—do you see there between those two tall trees?"

"Yes."

"Go straight there. Keep those trees before you; about a hundred paces to the right of the highest, at the very edge of the wood, you will strike a road, or rather a clearing. There the trunks are cut down, not burned down. You take



the road and it will lead you to the German's in five minutes. Years ago the hut was in the middle of the woods, and how the German ever got his supplies I don't know. But now the railroad has burned down half the woods and made things comfortable for him. We can have fresh meat every day. But the German lives mostly on canned goods—queer habit— Well, straight to the two cypress trees, then to the right till you reach the clearing—that's the way!"

I took leave of him with hearty thanks. The expedition at this hottest hour of the day was more difficult than I had expected. My way was often obstructed by a wall of scrubby underbrush. I stumbled more than once over the charred trunks of fallen trees, and then I sank deep into the swampy ground; but, finally, I came upon the clearing, and in a few moments reached the German's hut, constructed of age-blackened logs.

Luck was with me. The German sat on the doorstep, smoking.

At the first glance I realised that I had done my countryman an injustice in supposing, from his choice of a home in this inhospitable country, as I had seen it from the railroad, that he must be devoid of any taste for the beauties of Nature. Having once overcome the difficulties of the road,



one had to admit that this forsaken spot of earth possessed a remarkable majesty and grandeur.

In front of the hut the German had cleared an open space. The trees were felled; near by the ground was cultivated. All around rose the mighty cypress trees to a colossal height, beside the evergreen giant oaks. Evergreen! The noble trees here bore this name unjustly. Of the soft green of the oak leaves there was as little to be seen as of the dismal darker tint of the cypress trees. All these tree giants were hung with long, floating, wondrous veils of grey, and this beautiful, fantastic drapery transformed the entire forest into a mighty funeral procession following the coffin of desecrated Nature. It seemed as though the trees spared from the ravages of fire were sorrowing for their brothers, victims to man's brutality.

On every branch the moss had hung itself in long strands, here called Southern moss—*Tillandsia usneoides* is the botanical name—a moss peculiar to the Southern States and Mexico.

The tangled, dull, reseda grey-green moss which could ravage here undisturbed, had acquired such a luxuriance and thickness of growth that its grey tufts, which seemed to unite and intertwine in a mighty shroud, sucked the life of the trees, robbing them of light and air, until they were finally



destroyed. So it was the dead which buried the dead.

But what a noble, impressive scene it was—these stately trees, these gnarled branches and boughs all alike veiled in grey! And now a light breeze sprang up, setting the wonderful, floating mantle in noiseless, slow, swaying motion, so that at the first glance the illusion that the forest was advancing in stately, solemn march was perfect. And over the grey-veiled tops of the trees soared a hawk in the immeasurable blue of the heavens, balancing itself on its motionless, outstretched wings. I was so impressed by the singular beauty of this solitude in the wilderness that I paused for a moment to gaze in rapt admiration at the moss-shrouded trees, and the sky above, blue as the corn-flower's petals.

During my difficult walk I had troubled myself but little about my surroundings, and only now that an open space lay before me, could I grasp the full beauty of this wonderful Nature.

Now at last I looked over at my German, who on his side was gazing at me with apparent calm and without any particular interest, at all events without surprise. He did not rise from the step, neither did he remove the short pipe from his mouth.



I stepped towards him.

"Are you the German?" I asked him in our native tongue.

"Yes," he answered; "sit down." He held out his hand and moved along a little so that I could sit down comfortably beside him.

I now looked more closely at my countryman. He seemed to be an old man. He looked nearer seventy than sixty. One could easily see that in his younger days he might have been dangerous to women. He was still handsome, perhaps even handsomer than in his earlier youth. The blows of Fortune had left their impress upon him. The features of the weather-beaten, deeply furrowed face were hard and stern; the broad-brimmed grey slouch hat, pushed back on the head, only half covered the baldness. The head was almost destitute of hair. All the heavier was the grey, white-streaked beard which reached to his breast. The profile was nobly cut. The large eyes had a quiet expression of steady gravity. The man wore neither coat nor waistcoat. Around the collar of the blue woollen shirt a handkerchief was loosely tied. The dust-coloured corduroy trousers were thrust into the tops of his high, thick-soled boots. Out of his right hip pocket protruded the shining metal head of a revolver.



"You have not the ugliest spot on earth for your home," I began, "I must say that. It is really wonderful here."

"Yes, yes; it is very pretty."

"But it seems to me a little lonely for any length of time."

"Oh yes, yes, yes! It is lonely, that is true."

"You have been here a long time, so they tell me?"

"Yes, yes, very long."

"But I suppose you have travelled a great deal?"

"Travelled? Ah, no! Sometimes I go to Jacksonville—once a year, or perhaps not so often. But I only stay a few days, until I have finished my business, and then I come back here."

"Yes, but what do you do all day, if I may ask? Pardon my curiosity, but you are the first hermit I have ever met."

"What do I do? I think of many things and digest them."

"And you scarcely ever see a soul?"

"Scarcely ever. There is not a man here. There is no associating with that stupid Bennett at the station—the half-grown fellow who probably showed you the way here. I have no need of men's society. I have had enough of men."

I looked at the strange man in surprise. How



Fortune must have misused him, to foster such a love of solitude in him! I dared not question him further. We were silent awhile. We looked up at the tall branches, and at the slowly and noiselessly swaying veil of hanging moss.

Finally, he asked me how I came to stop at Cypress. Except he, scarcely any man in his senses had ever made use of the station. I told him the cause of my unwilling detention.

"You are a North German, judging from your accent. Where are you from?"

"Berlin—"

"Ah! yes, yes, yes! I thought so at once. Berlin! A fine city," he added, and for the first time the rigid sternness of his face relaxed a little, and a scarcely perceptible smile played around the corners of his mouth.

"You know Berlin?"

"Yes, yes, I know it. I used to live there, years ago. Eighteen years ago, I think—yes, eighteen years ago."

"It has changed much since then. Fine new quarters have been built up, and strangers find the city very beautiful with its broad streets and fine houses."

"Yes, yes! I can easily believe it. Fine houses! But sometimes the ugliest birds sit in



gold cages. So you live in Berlin! Yes, yes, it is a long time since I have spoken to a Berlin man. It must be nearly eighteen years. Did you live in Berlin eighteen years ago?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Ah, yes; then we must have acquaintances in common."

"In all probability. And if you are particularly interested in any one, please ask me. I will gladly give you any information that I can."

"Particularly interested? No! I am interested in no one in particular. No, no more. Not for many long years. Does that seem strange to you? I have sought solitude because nothing attracted me, nothing pleased me—because I no longer wished to know more of men. You know the story of the little girl who was given a beautiful doll for a Christmas present, and who threw the toy into the fire the next day. 'Why did you do that?' asked the mother. The child answered, 'I told my doll that I loved her, and she did not answer me.' Something of the same sort has happened to me."

"And you're contented in your withdrawal from the world?"

"I am without a wish. I have scarcely a real pleasure, but neither have I pain."



"To tell the truth, I do not envy you."

"I am not to be envied, and yet neither am I to be pitied. I have all I need, and I live just as I please."

He rose. "Will you take a glass with me? Then come in." But little light entered the interior of the log hut through the small glazed aperture that served as a window and through the open door. In contrast with the brightness of the glorious afternoon, the room seemed so dark that at first I could only distinguish the roughly constructed table in the middle of the room and the stool beside it, which were in the direct stream of sunshine from the open door.

Gradually my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, and I now saw in one corner on the left an open fireplace; near it, on the floor, a pyramid of tin cans and a battery of bottles. In the other left-hand corner was a pile of oranges, whose strong aroma filled the room to an overpowering degree. Into the beams opposite the door strong hooks were driven, from which hung guns and rifle-barrels of various kinds. On the shelf by the window I had already seen the box of ammunition. In addition there stood against the rough, uncovered logs which formed the walls, or lay on the



bare floor, implements of all kinds—a heavy axe, smaller hatchets, saws, hammers, etc., and a few pieces of crockery.

While the German thoughtfully and gravely mixed the beverage from various bottles, and added the finishing touch by squeezing in a few drops of orange juice, I asked him:

“But where is your bed?”

Without looking around or pausing in his preparations, he answered, “Just at the right of the door.”

Sure enough, there, in the darkest corner of the room, lay on the ground, about a foot in height, a pile of the grey tangled moss which was so beautiful in its long, swaying strands, but at a nearer view was extremely ugly. Thrown over it was the skin of a huge alligator.

“Hanging moss,” explained my host, who had tasted the mixture and seemed satisfied with it. “There is no better bed.”

I scarcely heard him, for the object that now caught my eye interested me in the highest degree. It was the only ornament in the room. Immediately over the bed was fastened a silken loop of ribbon. The colors were faded, but the exquisite embroidery was wonderfully preserved. I read the inscription. On one end was, “To my dear



Hugo. Martha." On the other, "Hercules and Omphale. September 30, 1873."

So Hugo Hall was my host—he who had long been lost to sight and was given up for dead.

But, no! That was scarcely possible. I had seen Hall many times at the beginning of the seventies, and also on the night of his first, his only success, when he appeared on the stage to thank the audience for their reception of his play, "Hercules and Omphale." I may pride myself on a good memory for faces. Not one feature in the face of the old man who now placed the glass on the table recalled the young playwright whom the entire house had cheered to the echo. And Hall was four, five years younger than I, but my host was surely my senior by at least fifteen years.

And yet, and yet!—as I looked at him now in the half light of the hut with redoubled attention, I almost succeeded in tracing the looked-for resemblance. The height was the same—I must make sure.

"I may perhaps have been indiscreet," I said; "at any rate it was unintentional. I have read the inscription 'Hercules and Omphale' on that loop of ribbon. Now I am committing an intentional indiscretion when I ask you, How do you come



by this trophy? A whole cycle of legends has sprung up concerning Hugo Hall, whom I also knew slightly, since his mysterious disappearance. Some have sent him out into the wide world, others have relegated him to a convent, and others still have buried him. So it would interest me much if you would tell me how you came by it."

"In the simplest way in the world. It was a present from the girl who was to have been my wife," answered Hall quietly.

"Then we can renew an old though slight acquaintance," I said, reaching out my hand, which he grasped. I gave him my name.

"Yes, yes; I remember. We met at the Welsheims, I think."

"No; I have never met the Welsheims, although we had many acquaintances in common. I had nothing to regret later, for the house, once so brilliant, came to a most deplorable end."

"Indeed! Yes, yes! A deplorable end! Your health."

He handed me the glass.

"Your health!" I answered, half emptied the glass and returned it to him. He drained it, dried his beard, and repeated, "Yes, yes, a deplorable end! You see I was mistaken when I said that nothing human interests me now— Not very



greatly—but still a little. What has become of Mrs. Welsheim?”

“You should ask, first, what has become of Mr. Welsheim, for the fate of the husband decided the fate of the wife— Well, then, Welsheim, who was spoiled by an uninterrupted series of successful speculations, and never supposed that he could go wrong, lost all his money some ten or twelve years ago, ending in a scandalous bankruptcy. The affair was made all the worse, as many innocent people had placed entire confidence in the lucky speculator, and were brought down in the crash. Welsheim could not remain in Berlin, and left the country. He is probably wandering somewhere in the East—Sopha or Bucharest. He is said to have tried his hand at everything without success.”

“Yes, yes—”

“His wife, the once-renowned beauty, brave in misfortune, separated from her husband, who lost with his money the only hold he had on her. People say that she returned to her parents. At any rate, she did not stay long with them. A few months later she showed herself at Ostend in very questionable society and in her customary striking costumes. She displayed the most extravagant luxury there, and later in Paris, which was de-



frayed by the pockets of various unprejudiced young men of the world. But that did not last long. With her rapidly fading charms, the life of luxury ended of itself. And suddenly she turned virtuous. The faded beauty married a withered tenor—a certain Vallini—whose name you may have formerly heard. The man, after a short year of unheard-of triumphs, lost his voice in consequence of a severe illness. A tenor without a voice! Do you know anything sadder? And since then he has carried on a miserable existence, appearing on ever smaller provincial stages. A friend of mine met him somewhere last autumn—at Elbing, I think it was—on a warm September day, in a dilapidated fur coat—the remnants of former grandeur—and on his arm his chastened wife, the once celebrated society woman, now with care-worn features, who prepares his morning coffee in the tin coffee-pot, and receives blows for thanks.”

“Yes, yes—blows!” repeated Hall, and again a fleeting smile played about his mouth.

In the mean while we had stepped out into the open air. “I must begin to think of getting back to my car,” I said. “My people don’t know what has become of me, and may be anxious if I remain away too long. Will you grant me a favour?”



Come with me and dine with us. Our coloured cook is not at all bad."

"Ah, no," answered the old man—"ah, no! You must excuse me; I am not for such things, and such things are not for me. So many people at once—and children— Let us not think of it! But, if you have nothing better to do, perhaps you will come again this afternoon; then, perhaps, you will tell me—about Vallini and his wife. And now go to your children. You will always find me here."

At three o'clock I returned to Hall's log hut. My information of the morning had evidently made a stronger impression upon him than I in my ignorance of the facts could have suspected and he himself would have admitted. He was at once warmer and more human than at our first meeting. His speech, which had been monotonous and drawling, was now vigorous, at times almost impassioned. The crater was not yet entirely extinct.

"Ja, wenn ein Mädél zwei  
Knaben Lieb hat,  
Thut wunderselten Gut.  
Das haben wir Beide erfahren  
Was falsche Liebe thut"—

So he began as we sat again together on the step of his hut, smoking—opposite the giant trees,



veiled and smothered in the hanging moss. And he told me the story of his love for Leonie, and his infidelity to Martha, which I have already told in detail.

“Do you see that hanging moss? It has fastened itself to the strongest trees. It has taken light and air from them. The trees still stand, but life is gone. I still stand. But is this a life, without air and light? But still I am satisfied with it. I am at least alone. Good-bye. This day will furnish me for a long time with food for thought. I shall have long to meditate upon it—perhaps until the end. Good-bye!”

We shook each other heartily by the hand.

The sun already hung low, and touched the boughs and underbrush with flecks of gold. The waving greyish veil which swayed slowly in the soft breeze, in stately and unspeakably melancholy cadence, now seemed to be interwoven with golden threads. As I turned for a last time towards the old man, before entering the underbrush, he waved his hand once more, and then pointed up to the beautiful but fatal veiling of the trees, now shimmering in unearthly loveliness.

THE END.



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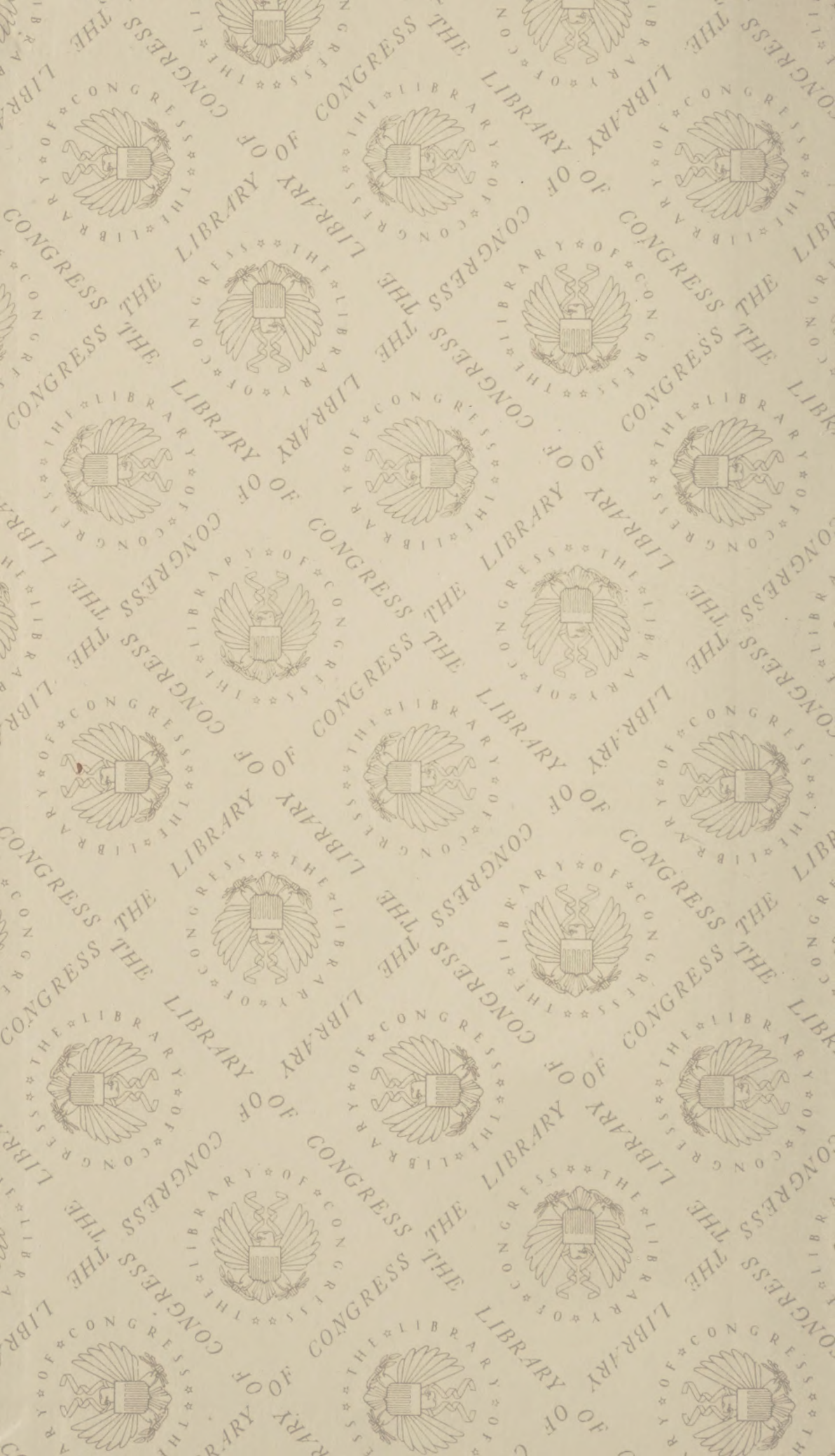










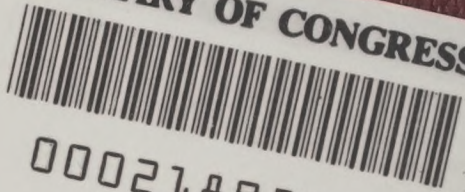








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